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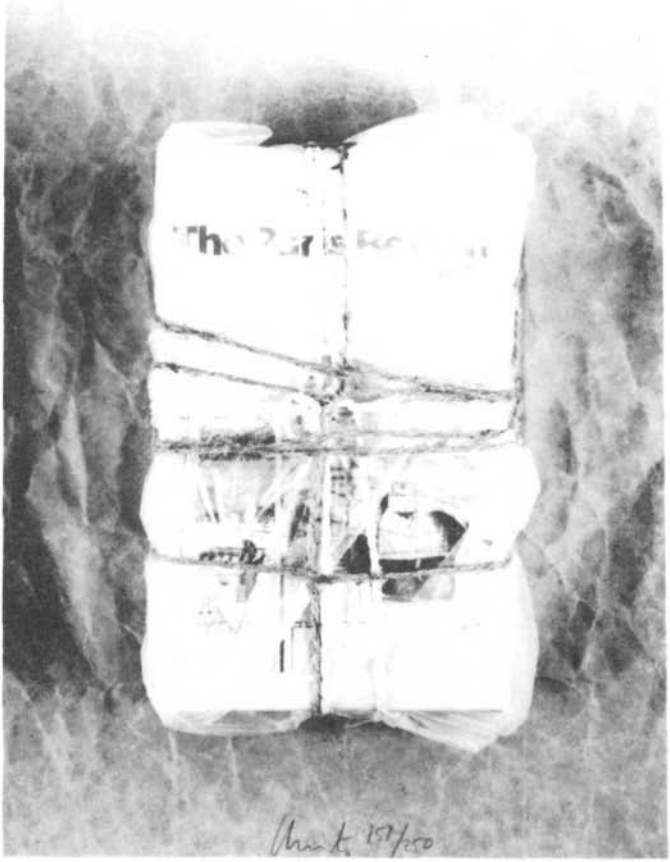

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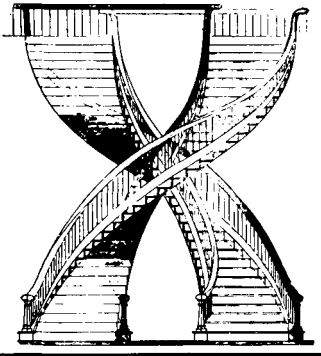

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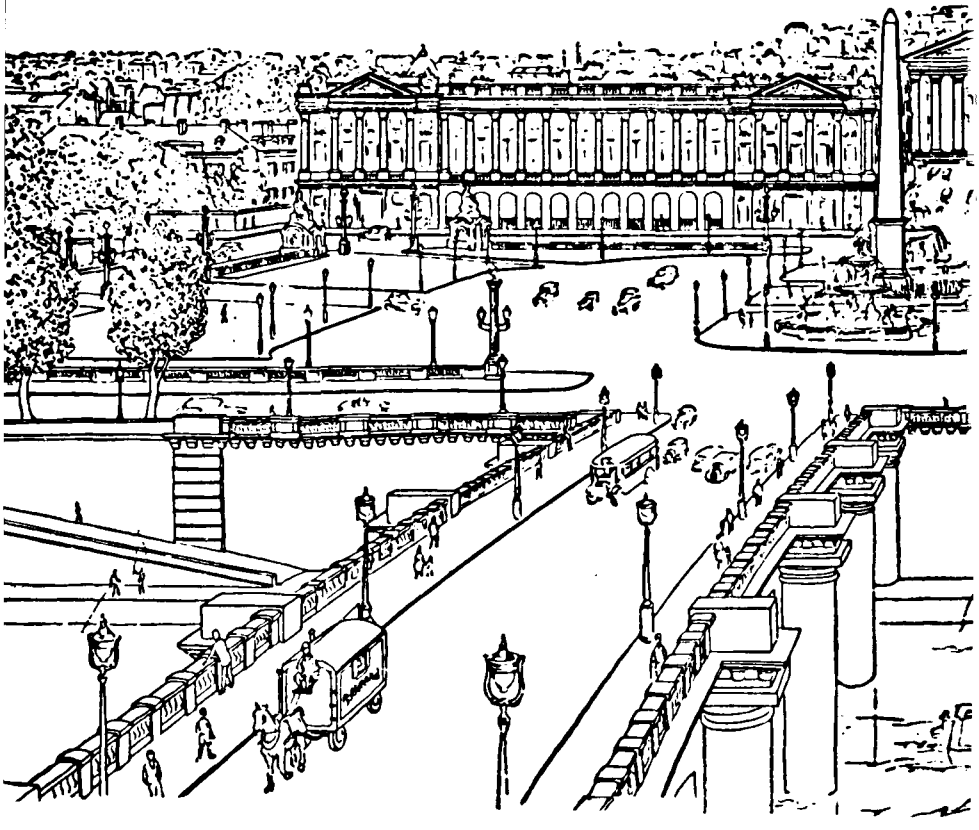

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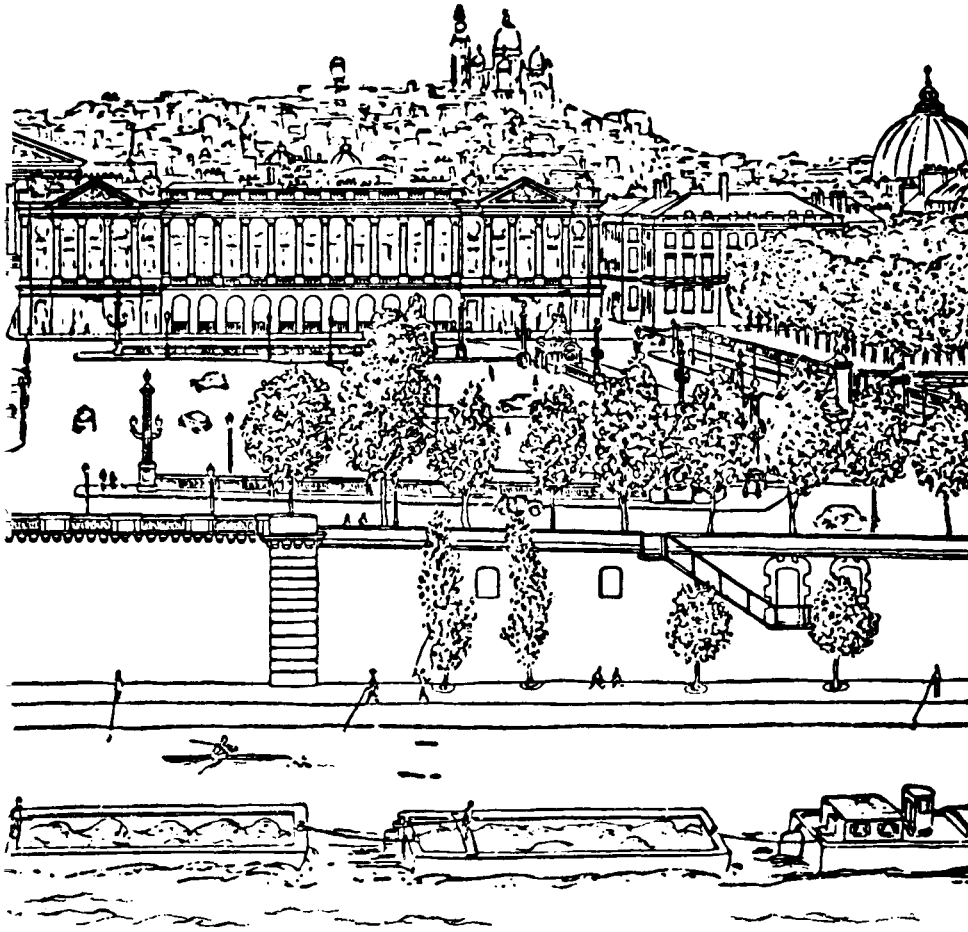

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from A Work in Progress

Norman Mailer

Author's Note

The ancient Egyptians believed there were seven parts to the soul which all behaved in different fashion after one's death, some departing quickly, others resting within the body to emerge at the appropriate hour. The Ka, or Double, of the dead man, for example, did not usually present himself until the mummy was resting in his tomb some seventy days and more after death.

These seven lights and forces, souls and spirits of the Soul, can be characterized as the Ren (one's secret name) the Sekhem (one's vital energy) the Khu (one's guardian angel) the Ba (one's heart) the Ka (one's double) the Khaibit (one's shadow, that is, one's memory) and the Sekhu (the remains) which is to say the residue of the man or woman's life that rests in the body while it is being embalmed, a much muted version of the self analogous to pools of water on a sand flat after the tide has receded.

The description that follows is told by the Sekhu of a dead man. It is his remains who speak:

A hook went into my nose, battered through the gate at the roof of the nostril, and plunged into my brain. Pieces, gobbets, and whole parts of the dead flesh of my mind were now brought out through one aperture of my nose, then the other.

This segment of Norman Mailer's forthcoming novel appears with the permission of *Playboy*.

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Yet for all it hurt, I could have been made of small rocks and roots. I ached no more than the earth when a weed is pulled and comes up with its hairs tearing away from the clods of the soil. Pain is present, but as the small cry of the uprooted plant. So did the hooks, narrow in their curve, go up the nose, enter the head, and poke like blind fingers in a burrow to catch stuffs of the brain and pull them away. Now I felt like a rock wall at the base of which rakes are ripping, and was warm curiously as though sunlight were baking, but it was only the breath of the first embalmer, hot with wine and figs—how clear was the sense of smell!

Still, an enigma remained. How could my mind continue to think while they pulled my brain apart? They were certainly scooping chunks of material as lively as dry sponge through the dry tunnels of my nose, and I realized—for there was a flash in my cranium when the hook first entered—that one of my lights in the Land of the Dead had certainly stirred. Was it the Ba, the Khaibit or the Ka that was now helping me to think? And I gagged as a particularly caustic drug, some wretched mixture of lime and ash, was poured in by the embalmers to dissolve whatever might still be stuck to the inside of my skull.

How long they worked I do not know, how long they allowed that liquid to dwell in the vault of my emptied head is but one more question. From time to time they lifted my feet, held me upside down, then set me back. Once they even turned me on my stomach to slosh the fluids, and let the caustic eat out my eyes. Two flowers could have been plucked when those eyes were gone.

At night my body would go cold; by midday it was close to warm. Of course I could not see, but I could smell, and got to know the embalmers. One wore perfume yet his body always carried the unmistakable pungency of a cat in heat; the other was a heavy fellow with a heavy odor not altogether bad—he was the one with breath of wine and figs. He smelled as well of fields and mud, and rich food was usually in him—a meat-eater, his sweat was strong yet not unpleasant—something loyal came out of the gravies of his flesh. Because I could smell them as they approached, I knew it was daylight so soon as the

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embalmers arrived, and I could count the hours. (Their scent altered with the heat of the air in this place.) From midday to three, every redolence, good and bad, of the hot banks of the Nile was also near. After a time I came to realize I must be in a tent. There was often the crack of sailcloth flapping overhead, and gusts would clap at my hair, a sensation as definite in impression as a hoof stepping on grass. My hearing had begun to return but by a curious route. For I had no interest in what was said. I was aware of the voices of others, but felt no desire to comprehend the words. They were not even like the cry of animals so much as the lolling of surf or the skittering of wind. Yet my mind felt capable of surpassing clarity.

Once I think Hathfertiti came to visit, or since it is likely the tent was on family grounds, it is possible she strolled through the gardens and stopped to look in. Certainly I caught her scent. It was Hathfertiti, certain enough; she gave one sob, as if belief in the mortal end of her son had finally come, and left immediately.

Somewhere in those first few days they made an incision in the side of my belly with a sharp flint knife—I know how sharp for even with the few senses my Remains could still employ, a sense of sharpness went through me like a plow breaking ground, but sharper, as if I were a snake cut in two by a chariot wheel, and then began the most detailed searching. It is hard to describe, for it did not hurt, but I was ready in those hours to think of the inside of my torso as common to a forest in a grove, and one by one trees were removed, their roots disturbing veins of rock, their leaves murmuring. I had dreams of cities drifting down the Nile like floating islands. Yet when the work was done, I felt larger, as if my senses now lived in a larger space. Was it that my heart and lungs had been placed in one jar, and my stomach and small intestines in another? Leave it that my organs were spread out in different places, floating in different fluids and spices, yet still existing about me, a village. Eventually, their allegiance would be lost. Wrapped and placed in the Canopic jars, what they knew of my life would then be offered to their own God.

How I brooded over what those Gods would know of me

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once my organs were in Their jars. Qebhsenuf would dwell in my liver and know of all the days when my liver's juices had been brave; as well would Qebhsenuf know of the hours when the liver, like me, lived in the fog of a long fear. A simple example, the liver, but more agreeable to contemplate than my lungs. For, with all they knew of my passions would they still be loyal once they moved into the jar of the jackal Tuamutef, and lived in the domain of that scavenger? I did not know. So long, at least, as my organs remained unwrapped, and therefore in a manner still belonged to me, I could understand how once embalmed, and in their jar, I would lose them. No matter how scattered my parts might be over all the tables of this tent, there still remained the sense of family among us—the vessel of my empty corpse comfortably surrounded by old fleshly islands of endeavor, these lungs, liver, stomach and big and little guts all attached to the same memories of my life (if with their own separate and fiercely prejudiced view—how different, after all, had my life seemed to my liver and to my heart). So, not at all, therefore, was this embalming tent as I had expected, no, no bloody abattoir like a butcher's stall, more like an herb kitchen. Certainly the odors encouraged the same long flights of fancy you could find in a spice shop. Merely figure the vertigos of my nose when the empty cavity of my body (so much emptier than the belly of a woman who has just given birth) was now washed, soothed and stimulated, cleansed, peppered, herbified, and left with a resonance through which no hint of the body's corruption could breathe. They scoured the bloody inside with palm wine, and left the memories of my flesh in ferment. They pounded in spices and peppers, and rare sage from the limestone foundations to the West; then came leaves of thyme and the honey of bees who had fed on thyme, the oil of orange was rubbed into the cavity of the ribs, and the oil of lemon blamed the inside of my lower back to free it of the stubborn redolence of the viscera. Cedar chips, essence of jasmine, and branchlets of myrrh were crushed—I could hear the cries of the plants being broken more clearly than the sound of human voices. The myrrh even made its clarion call. A powerful aromatic (as powerful in the

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kingdom of herbs as the Pharaoh's voice) was the myrrh laid into the open shell of my body. Next came cinnamon leaves, stem, and cinnamon bark to sweeten the myrrh. Like rare powders added to the sweetmeats in the stuffing of a pigeon, were these bewildering atmospheres they laid into me. Dizzy was I with their beauty. When done, they sewed up the long cut in the side of my body, and I seemed to rise through high vales of fever while something of memory, intoxicated by these tendrils of the earth, began to dance and the oldest of my friends was young while the children of my mistresses grew old. I was like a royal barge lifted into the air under the ministrations of a rare vizier.

Cleaned, stuffed, and trussed, I was deposited in a bath of natron—that salt which dries the meat to stone—and there I lay with weights to keep me down. Slowly, over the endless days that followed, as the waters of my own body were given up the thirst of the salt (which drank at my flesh like caravans arriving at an oasis) so all moisture, with its insatiable desire to liquefy my meats, had to leave my limbs. Bathed in natron, I became hard as the wood of a hull, then hard as the rock of the earth, and felt the last of me depart to join my Ka, my Ba, and my fearsome Khaibit. And the shell of my body entered the stone of ten thousand years. If there was nothing I could smell any longer (no more than a stone can be aware of a scent), still the hardened flesh of my body became like one of those spiraled chambers of the sea that are thrown up on the beach, yet contain the roar of waters when you hold them to your ear. I became not unlike the roar of waters, for I was close to hearing old voices that passed across the sands—if now I could not smell, I could certainly hear—and like the dolphin whose ears are reputed able to pick up echoes from the other end of the sea, so I sank into the bath of natron, and my body passed farther and farther away. Like a stone washed by fog, baked by sun, and given the flavor of the water on the bank, I was entering that universe of the dumb where it was part of our gift to hear the story told by every wind to every stone.

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Portfolio

Time Tablets

Francesco Clemente

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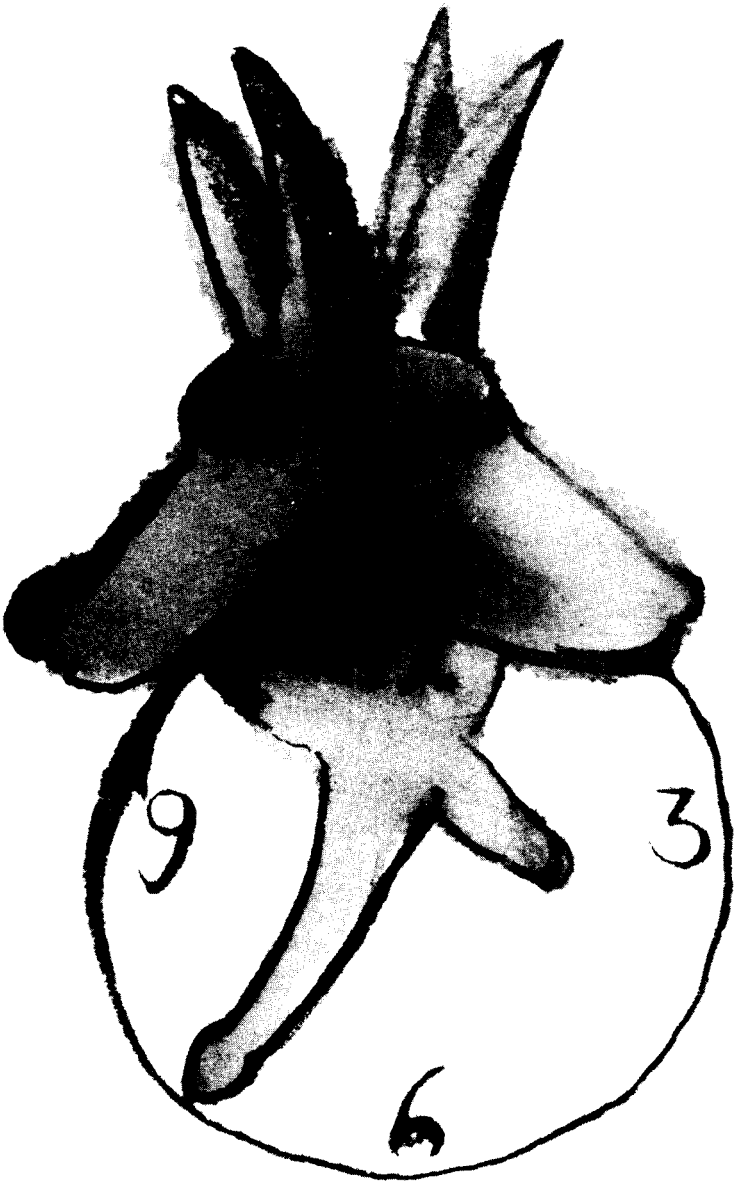

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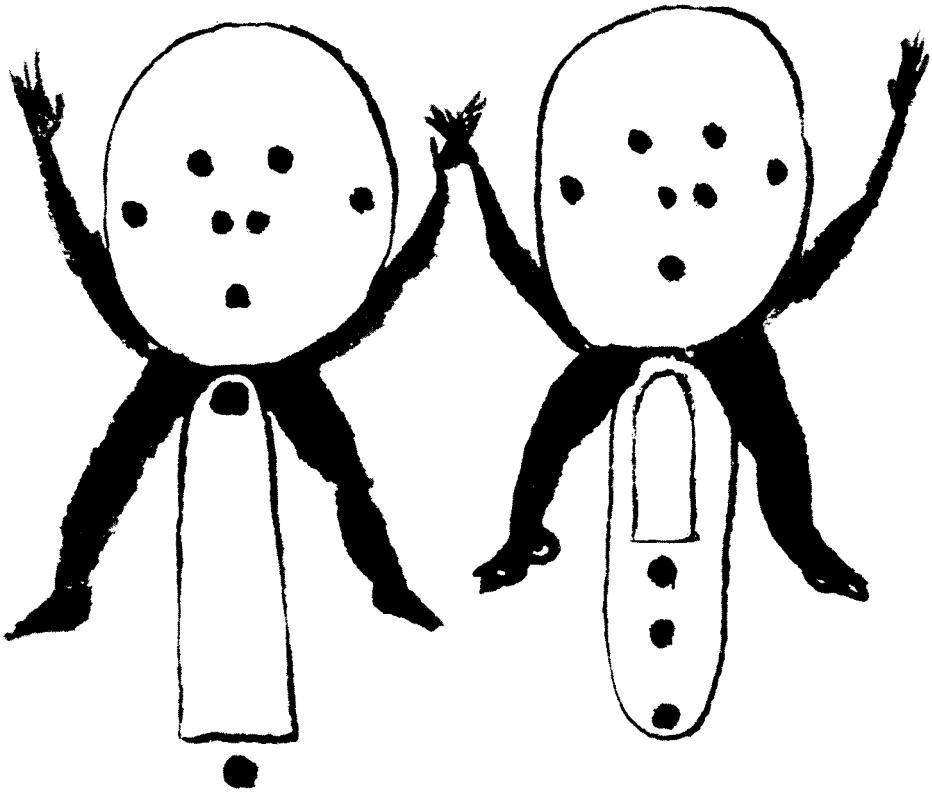

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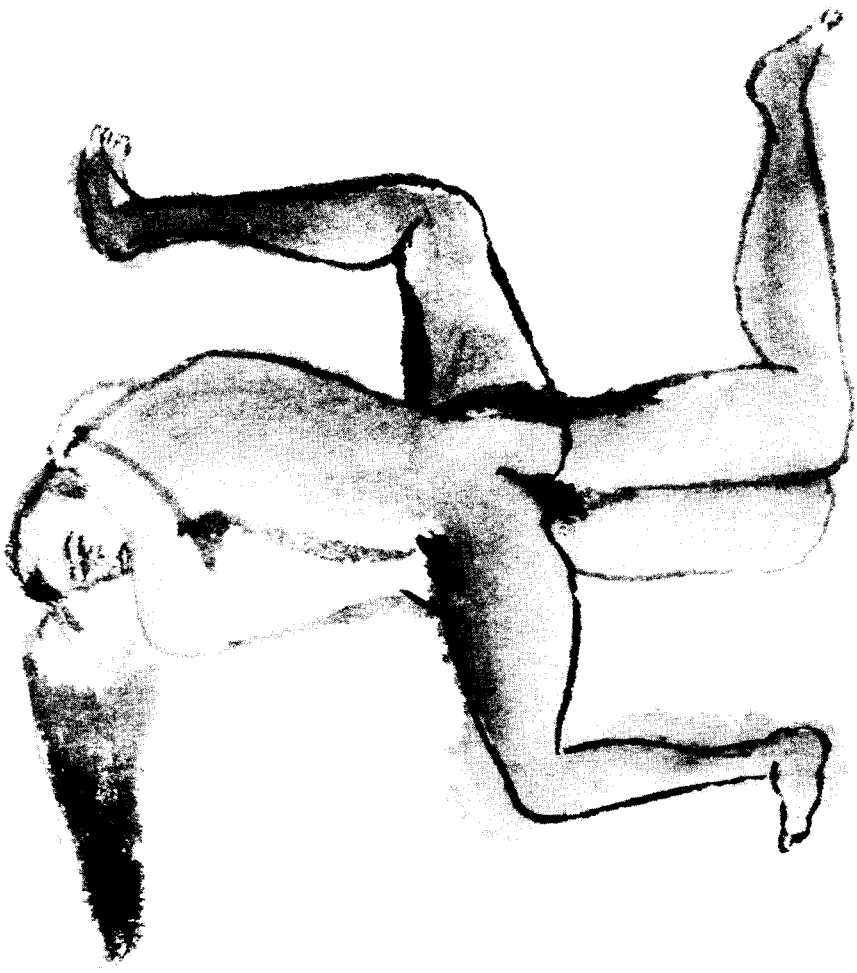

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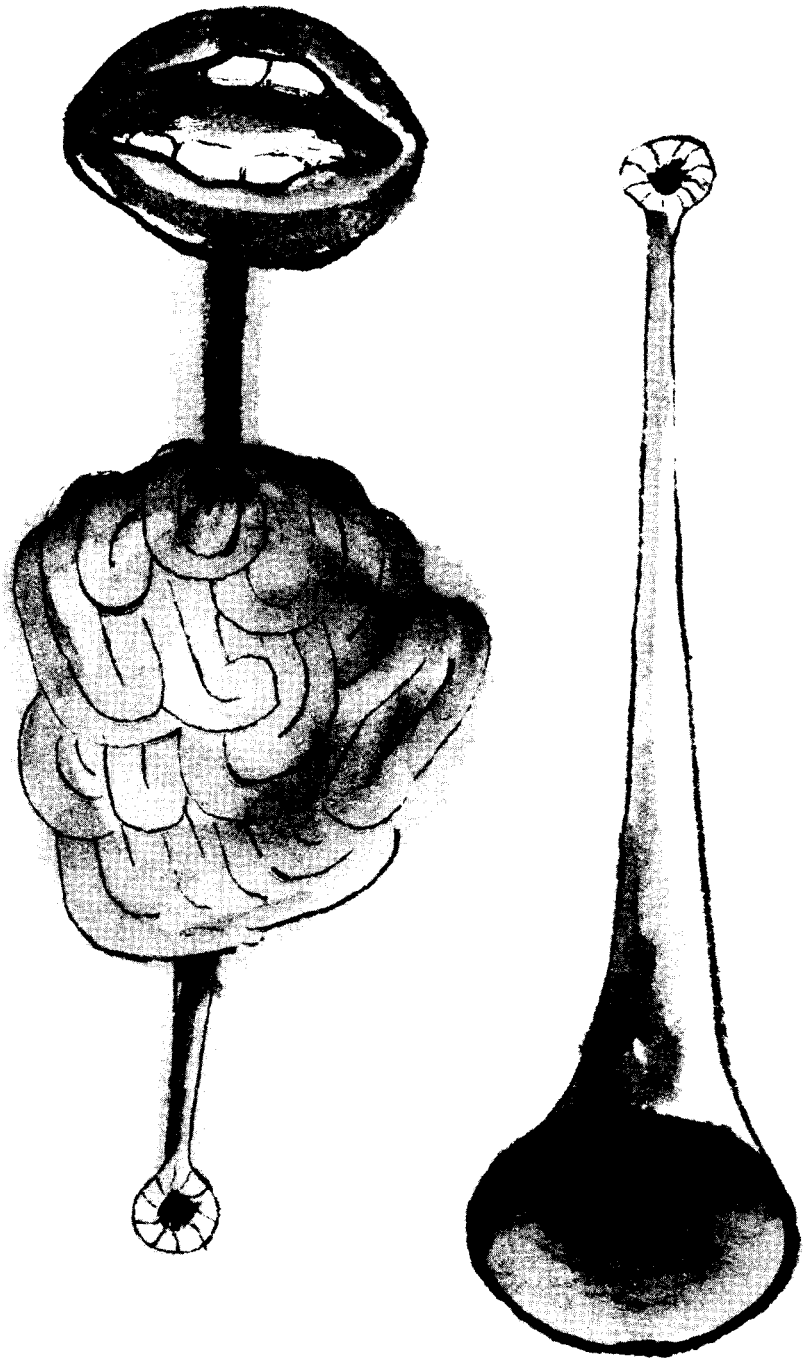

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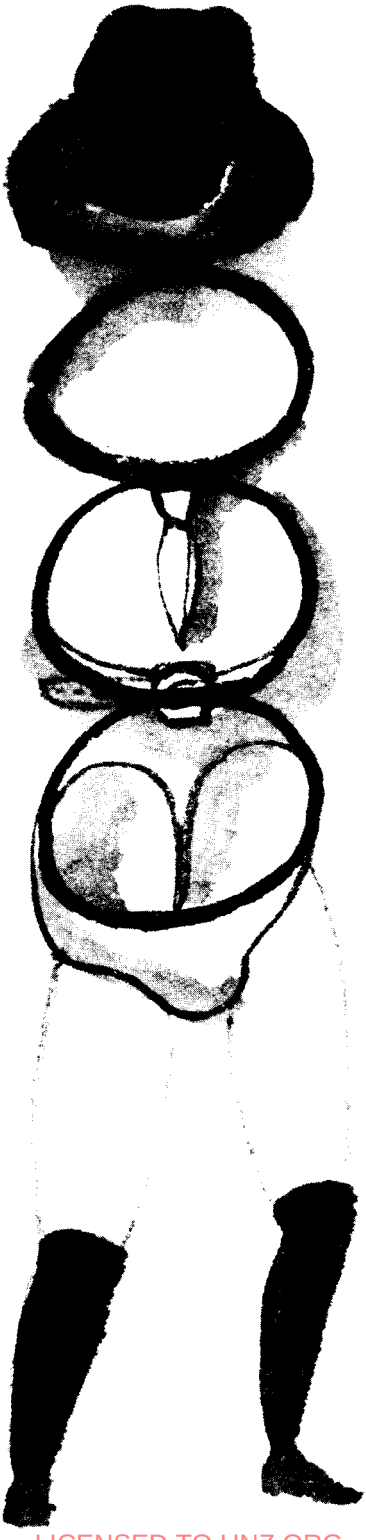

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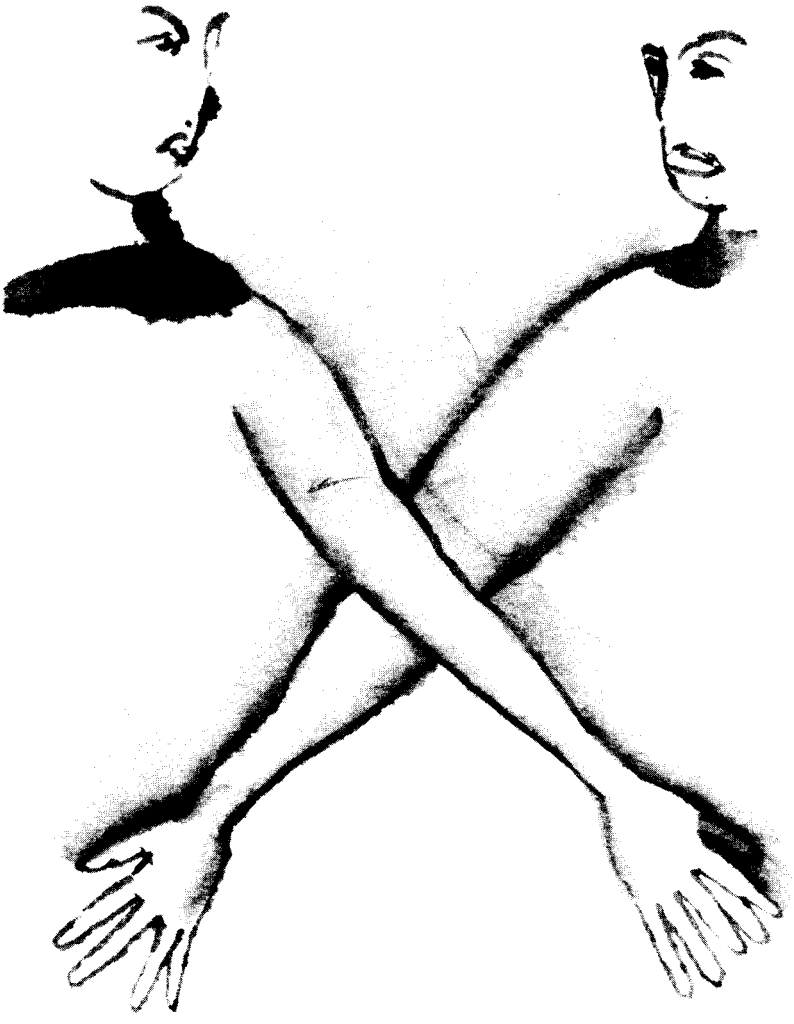

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A Life of Crime

Lamar Herrin

He is not a lazy man, not a cruel man, not a sick, sad, or even unsuccessful man. He is just not the man I wanted to become.

He sits with his feet propped up on a desk reading a book. The room he reads in is narrow and unadorned, badly in need of first a soap-and-water wash to see what scraping and sanding and painting needs to be done. It is half full of unarranged boxes and cases of books. Next door (the door is roughly behind his head, midway down the right wall) there's another room of identical size and grayness and here the books are neatly shelved (and the shelves are full) in accordance with the simplest system of classification he knows of: those books he likes are stacked along the far right wall; those he's unsure of or hasn't gotten to, down the center; and those he's read and found wanting, along the left. Having read most of the world's great books he's now come to its mysteries and the book in his hand—Raymond Chandler's *The Lady in the Lake*—like those piled up on his desk—Hammett, Stout, Gardner, MacDonald—is about to go up along the left wall.

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For one overriding reason. Every detective novel he's ever read (he would exclude the British here and their parlor game treatment of the genre) has been an elaborate and wasteful and blood-spattered dodge on the part of the detective to keep from investigating himself. Phillip Marlowe should ask himself why he needs a crime and a criminal as positively as he needs air and food; so should Lew Archer. Nick Charles (strange, his own name is Charles, his son's name is Nick), once he gets the gin bottles cleared away, should inquire why only during the heat of the investigation does he feel alive. The more labyrinthine the book's plot the more labyrinthine the hero's evasion and when the moment finally comes and the detective stands face to face with the misbred monster at the center he is farther than ever from being able to recognize himself. Right now (James Galway is playing Mozart's Second Flute Concerto on the radio, past the picture window in front, the November day is a flute-light, flute-bright continuation of Indian summer) Phillip Marlowe is leading a bad cop named Degarmo up a mountain to the scene of the murder not because things are in doubt and he needs a confession but because he, Marlowe, hasn't gotten enough, because Marlowe wants more, because the blood-sucking isn't over until the last drop is gone. He—Marlowe, Archer, Charles, Gardner, Wolfe—should ask himself why.

Still, not the man I wanted to become. Not the picture of myself at age thirty-five I wanted to see. The thin knobby legs, the jogging sneakers aged and weathered until their caution-giving colors are lost to the world as whatever colors this room once wore. The gray-green work pants, loose and lusterless, also like this room. The frayed checked shirt. In four years I have sat here and read so many books that a part of me seems to stand outside now, looking in. From outside my customers will enter—a sign hanging in the picture window says "Used Books, Charles Simmons, proprietor," the other side says "Closed"—and when school is over, so will my eleven-year-old son. But I can follow Phillip Marlowe up that southern California mountain to Little Fawn Lake and listen to James Galway perform aerial arabesques with his flute and stand on the side-

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walk outside and let the warmth of the sun at the roots of my hair—be three, four, any number of places at once, and nothing is lost. . . .

Except whatever it is I might have been and am not.

My hair *needs* sun and warmth. It *needs* light. Its black vigor is gone. There are matted curls along the collar of the shirt that haven't seen a comb in months. There's the dust of every day there I've spent sitting in this store, feet propped on this desk whose top has been gouged by men less temperate than me and whose oak-stained plywood panels luff out like sails full of useless air. The desk goes nowhere. I picked it up—as I pick up most of my books—at a neighborhood garage sale. That's also where I met Lisa, after failing to meet her at all the bars and discotheques where that sort of meeting is supposed to take place. It was Barbara who suggested that I try a different sort of woman out, one less like her, more to my liking, more like Lisa. . . .

The fact is, business has improved, continues to improve. He could afford to paint the place, buy some new clothes, have someone who knows what he's doing see to his hair. The next room over he moved into nearly a year ago. Beyond that there's another empty room he could take over if he wanted to, although another door would have to be pounded out of the wall. In fact there're three more narrow one-story brick stores before the corner of Trenton and Warner, suburb of Clayton, city of St. Louis, where Blackall's Pharmacy is located. Blackall's Pharmacy is slowly losing the fight to the large discount-chain pharmacies and he knows the day will come when he could take that large corner building over too. That would give him four more rooms to fill with books. He wonders if he could read that many—Marlowe has sprung his trap now and Degarmo, the murderer, has to stand there and hear it gloatingly played back while a small-town sheriff looks on in admiration—he wonders if there are that many left to read.

What a glorious mating when the New Irish Chamber Orchestra swells up under Galway's flute and embraces it—the body putting flesh on the spirit, the spirit making cause with the flesh. With only the screen door between us I can hear it

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here on the sidewalk although the radio, a Tandberg, a good one, is not turned up loud. St. Louis as it drifts toward the west is made up of peaceful older pockets and very wealthy newer pockets and parks that keep a semblance of peace during the day and then vast violent stretches of urban ruin. But the city drifts westward because downtown with its historic landmarks and its silver arch is dead and the tether has been cut. Standing here on quiet curving Trenton Street waiting for my son I can feel its flow. It's like a deeply decelerated tidal surge, at times unsettling. Other times, now, with the sun spilling down and the Mozart playing and the oak and elm leaves crisping in the breeze, it's as if no more than one out of every hundred of the corpuscles making up my blood contained a fine gravid center pulling to be gone.

He seems to feel it more than I do. He reads quickly, feeding off page after page of print as perhaps the detective feeds off the suspects he interrogates, getting just enough nourishment from one page to allow him to move hungrily, begrudgingly ahead. His eyes are good, but a squinch has developed and lines fan out from the corners. He has, he knows, a face showing the death's head underneath. That's all right, he accepts that almost gladly, especially when he thinks of the prosperous, fat-faced crowd Carter brought with him out of the South and who when Carter was finished didn't necessarily go home. He can live with the high, narrow forehead, the sunken temples, the enlarged sockets, the stubbed, cartilage-spare nose, the line of the jaw running from ear to ear, yet delicately fashioned, bound, giving his death's-head face the unrugged molding of a sensitive boy. But the skin is bad. It's gone dry on him, its pallor belongs in a cave. Women have found him attractive, but those same women have also found the ruddier-skinned, more muscular men attractive, the ones that his attractiveness was supposed to supplant. Unmasked, Degarmo pulls a gun, steals a car, runs a roadblock and then is shot off a resort-lake dam just as Marlowe had figured, counted on. Between second and third movements of the Mozart concerto the announcer breaks in to inform his listeners that it is now official, what has long been rumored has now become fact: The Rolling Stones *will* play St.

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Louis during their latest concert tour around the country. The concert will take place in exactly ten days and only mail orders for tickets will be accepted. Then the announcer gives the price—$17.50—and the address to which the money order or cashier's check should be sent.

St. Louis in its slow, dispersed flow west has not been forgotten. St. Louis, bad-pressed, neglected, joked-about long enough, is back on the map. The announcer said something like that with his tongue near his cheek, but not quite in it. Then, suspending Mozart, with his tongue sticking out, he played a cut from The Stones' latest album in honor of the honor.

Ain't no use in cryin'
Stay away from me.
Ain't no use,
Ain't no use,
Stay away from me.

And I watched the man reading the book finish it and with an expression of tight-lipped disapproval—whether incidental or deep, whether for the music or the fiction, I couldn't tell—toss it onto the stack of the others destined for the "It's up to you but I don't recommend" side of the room. Then I went back in and turned down the radio—down but not off, for I assumed once the Stones had been thanked for their magnanimity Mozart would be put back on. A customer followed me in asking for a novel by a local author, Stanley Elkin, and I showed him where Elkin, a right-sider, a favorite, was shelved. Then I sat down at my desk, and from the stack of those books still to be read selected Ross MacDonald's *The Goodbye Look* while, feet up, I waited for my son.

▼

Detect forward, not backward. Stalk your prey out into the uncharted spaces of the future where crimes are as common as unrealized desires and a man can bag his limit in a flash. Where there is no limit. Read faces, gestures, clothing, possessions, living quarters into the future, not into the past. Why not? Into

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one crime, yours. What crime am I putting off, preparing for, sitting here? The Rolling Stones, Mozart; The Rolling Stones again—"I'm not waiting for a laaadee, I'm just waiting for a friend"—then the third Brandenburg concerto. A clue—read it. Of all the crimes imaginable—what limit to the ways a man might transgress?—find yours. That's the book that Charley Simmons wants to pick up, Lew Archer, stubborn, querulous, burned-out, nursing a single cynical coal against the northwind of unfeeling, of death, take that elaborate wind-sheltering network of tunnels and trenches excavated in the past and fling it against the future like a man flinging precious relics into a fire. What's left? What flame-resistant object remains? What clue? In *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* he has read that a soul desiring release from the cycle of incarnations must journey through a world full of lavishly staged visions—terrible and delightful, all vivid, all false. After forty-nine days he comes to the last. More than any of the others it's the one he must resist. There above him, as though swimming up to it, he sees in a peach-fleshed light a sea of copulating couples. He sees life in the making—his own. If it's Nirvana he's after he must turn his back on this magnificent delusory display; if it's a future in the flesh he wants he may choose his parents, select the most voluptuous, strike home there. . . .

"D'you hear the news?"

My son, Nick, has come in, carrying his red backpack which he swings up onto my desk.

I put down *The Goodbye Look*. That sea of copulating couples fades less quickly from my mind. Nick sped home to his mother's womb with barely a glance at me. He's got her high cheeks, her high Colorado coloring, eyes a cold sparkling blue and hair a coarse blonde. A soccer player, he's got her strong, reliable knees, the knees for it. His habitual expression suggests a willingness to believe, acquire, participate, even plunge in, but with something—a last excited leap to the features, a final notch to the smile—held back against an error in judgment, as capital for a fresh start. That's Barbara, that's the effect of growing up under the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, which don't, regardless of the girlish enthusiasm of the

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day, begin to move around.

"Could be," I say, suspecting I've heard it now twice. "Let's hear it again."

"The Rolling Stones are coming to town!"

"I've heard it."

"Can I go?"

"Can you what?"

He starts to repeat himself and stops. That's the caution, the little held in reserve I'm talking about—for he's understood that his father's question has nothing to with hearing loss or inattentiveness, just disbelief.

"Can *you* go?" I repeat it for him.

"Yes. . . I. . . " The enthusiasm is there, but he's built a wall around it and stationed his sentries. Nobody *taught* him that. "Mrs. Newberry says The Stones are the last rock-'n-roll band left that can bring all the people together, unite the generations."

"She said that? That The Rolling Stones can unite the generations?"

"Yeah, in Social Studies this afternoon when we heard the news we talked about things that can unite the generations. Mrs. Newberry says not many things can anymore. She says we live in a time of . . . di . . . vi . . . sive . . . ness," his eyes leave mine and seek the blackboard where Mrs. Newberry has obviously written the word out to be memorized, "and individual. . . " again he falters, this time looking off into the second room where two customers, a college-aged girl and an elderly man, a grocer, are stocking up, ". . . whoring. . . "

"What?"

"Whor—"

"I heard you."

My son snickers, a playful, grown-up, knowing little smile that all but dissolves my knot of bad humor.

"You mean something else," I tell him.

"I know," he says, still smiling, winning now and careful to keep the smile from becoming mocking and cute. "I can't pronounce it."

"A time of divisiveness and individual. . . hoarding?" I give

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it a try, swinging my legs down from my desk in the process and leaning up on my elbows to see how it takes. Nick sits down on a corner of the desk beside his bookbag.

"That's it...hoar..." and he withholds the 'd' for an instant, just long enough to get his father to grin, "...*d*ing."

"That's what Mrs. Newberry said—that we live in a time of divisiveness and individual hoarding?"

"That's it—divisiveness and individual hoarding—that's what she said."

"And that The Rolling Stones can unite us?"

Eagerly he nods.

"Nick," I tell him squarely, "The Rolling Stones can't do that."

"Mrs. Newberry—"

"Mrs. Newberry was wishing they could, she was wishing that something could, and maybe something can...but it won't be The Rolling Stones."

"Maybe if all the generations go they can!"

"All the generations won't."

"But maybe if they did."

"At $17.50 a crack?"

"Well...it'd be worth it!"

"No way, José."

He's dashed, all except for that little undashable part of himself that he holds in reserve and that now keeps him from tears. I soften my voice, get chummy. "Can you see Grandmama Henry at a Rolling Stones concert, Nick? 'Let's spend this night together'...yea, yea, yea!" I thump it out on the desk and laugh. Grandmama Henry is my mother, Henrietta, as staunch a foe of a fan of The Rolling Stones as Nick is likely to find. He credits me for the effort, little more.

"I wanna go," he says. "I think it's like an assignment."

"I doubt that," I say.

"I wanna go," he repeats.

"No," I say.

"I'll use my own money."

"Money's not the issue here. Drugs and alcohol and people blowing their mind—that's the issue. And the little over-

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looked fact that you're only eleven years old."

"That's not the way it's gonna be. That's only the way it used to be. Mrs. Newberry says. . ."

Mrs. Newberry. . . for an instant I see her: young, a bit bony, not very graceful, snappy in her commendations and her criticism, and holding herself back. I see right through her fond, startled, wide-eyed fragility and into her wishful heart. Suddenly—it's the mysteries I've been reading—she stands as a clue. She tells me something. So wrong, so wanting to be right. So much persuasion stored up in that body of unmalicious, unfulfilled bones.

So I cut my son off. "I don't care what she says. She doesn't know what she's talking about. She's wrong."

"She *does* know." He's got another tone now, one of a much-tried patience. "She's a fan. She's been listening to The Stones since she was our age. Just call her up and ask her, Dad."

"I'm sorry, Nick," and I shake my head. "No."

For a moment he sits there with his gaze lowered to his backpack. A thread is loose, which he picks at, undoing two or three stitches. When he looks up his voice is craftily incidental. "What if Mother says I can go?" he asks.

"Your mother won't say you can go."

"Yeah. . ." and he draws it out, insolent and cool, "but what if she does?"

I shrug, not quite sure what I want the shrug to convey, except my displeasure. "You live with your mother," I tell him.

"And if she says I can go that means I can, doesn't it?"

Releasing a harsh warning sigh I push back in my chair and raise my face to the ceiling. I don't like to look at it long because its off-white has changed to a sickly shade of gray and I don't understand what except the discharge of books packed too tightly on the shelves could have caused such a discoloration.

"Doesn't it?" he repeats, working his advantage.

"Go on home now, Nick," I say. "You're not being very pleasant."

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"You just don't want to admit—"

"Take off, buddy! I mean it!"

Undaunted, he hops down off the desktop and airily swings the backpack containing books and gym shoes and lunch box and baseball and football cards and his rubik's cube and whatever notes he took (or dittoes Mrs. Newberry passed out) on The Rolling Stones over his shoulder. He wants to say something more, and so do I. He's uncomfortable trying to lord it over his father and I don't enjoy playing the authoritarian rock. But he makes it to the door, and once there it's only "Hey, you're right, I'm wrong, let's start all over" and neither of us wants to say that. I throw my legs back up onto the desk. There is, of course, that part of me that follows him outside. I like the way he strides—even acting, still in his high and haughty part. It's in the knees; they are slender and stout. There's not a hint of loose-jointedness, and for an eleven-year-old to be able to put one foot in front of the next as if he had determined his destination and trusted his legs to take him there is worth watching, worth getting up for.

Behind me Charley Simmons has just taken a five dollar bill from the college-aged girl and asked for fifty cents more. She's bought the two volumes of Erich Neumann's *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (good condition and long out of print), plus a novel by Margaret Atwood. Deliberately she slides a hand down into her tight jeans pocket and it's the sort of deliberateness that may represent an argument with the prices, but he admires it nonetheless. Both the way she chooses to fish out her money and the way she chooses to argue. The breeze has died. How long, I wonder, can this warmth last? I'm reminded of a gracefully-extinguishing coal, with all the combustion and heat-exertion taken out. In such a warmth the brick duplexes and small apartment buildings up toward the park lose a bit of their deepsunkenness and the voices of children out from school have a mellow warbling after-ring their parents may never have heard. My own son Nick stops at Blackall's Pharmacy and emerges with a candy bar which he unwraps just as deliberately as the girl inside comes up with her extra money. He knows I'm here watching him, he suspects it, and

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even if I'm not he's demonstrating to himself that he won't be bullied out of the neighborhood. He's right, after all, and he's got Mrs. Newberry to prove it. I breathe deeply and release. The girl says, "You know those Neumann (she pronounces it Newman) only cost $1.85 new. The price is printed here in the corner." He shows her the edition date of 1962 and asks her to figure inflation in, to determine the dollars-and-cents worth of a book hard to get. When she comes out the door centering the weight of her backpack between her shoulders I hear no grumbling directed at Charley Simmons or his used bookstore and I assume she's been won. Her money goes into a drawer in the desk and at night goes home. The man who follows her out pays over ten dollars for some best seller reading and a month from now will be back, willing to trade for a loss, but at a gain of thousands and thousands of words. Before he's gone three or four more customers have come in and, at these prices hardly anyone browses without buying. The money piles up. With no overhead to speak of (overhead are the dirty ceilings and two—only two—long fluorescent bulbs) he makes a decent living, reading and rating what he sells. University students and even professors have come to rely on his tastes. Cash-'n-carry from the start, he keeps no books and pays no taxes, but the IRS has got bigger fish to fry. He's got a brother in Madisonville, Indiana, living well off a wholesale paper and janitorial supply company their father worked himself to death to establish. He's got a sister married to the owner of a tire store in Syracuse, New York, where snow and salt and potholed streets guarantee good business. He's got a mother who has it all figured out. Recessions mean unemployment and unemployment means extra entertainment time. The soap operas, since they only tell stories about the haves and the have-a-lots, will end up driving unemployed free-timers back to books, and the books, of course, will have to be used. Although she'll admit she thought he was coming apart when he left his family and quit graduate school and began to die daily in his tipped-back chair, she's now advising him to sit tight. He just might be onto a good—not a great, no, certainly not a great—but a better-than-nothing thing. Yes, much better than nothing.

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Yet there is this deep distractedness, this restless splitting-off of selves he feels. With The Rolling Stones coming to St. Louis and the generations reportedly uniting around them, he feels, vaguely, the need to get out. With the weather as mild and unsurpassable as he's likely to see it, he still feels this need. It must have to do with these mysteries he's been reading. He puts Lew Archer and *The Goodbye Look* down. Like a motor left running when the switch has been cut, the investigation, the search, chirrs on inside him before quietly spinning to a halt. He hears readers clearing throats in the next room; he hears the creak of the middle bookcase in front, the one he's eventually going to have to empty of its books and rebuild. With even strides and regulated breath a jogger runs by the picture window fronting the store, an expression of great diligence on his face, as though he were monitoring all his vital signs at once. Search for *what*? What if The Rolling Stones *could* do it? With a practiced motion and a long left arm, he reaches back and turns the radio on. Mahler, Mahler's 4th, a moment tuneful, wistful, and sad. He leaves it on, lowers the volume to a whisper which swells and subsides. He's not the man for depressions and he wouldn't call this one, but something is going to happen, he's ripe for it, the future is taking shape. He says, Sitting here right now, reading, doing business, turning a profit, quarreling with my son, thinking of my ex-wife I'll have to call, thinking of Mrs. Newberry's fine sentiments, thinking of what my mother and her more sensible children would say, thinking of Lisa who never troubles to be troubled by anything, thinking at thirty-five of the man I've become, I'm a clue, only a clue—and I believe him.

▼

Just before closing Jonathan comes in. Jonathan is another local novelist and a great admirer of mine. His last name is Sheraton and the first thing he does after entering the store is head straight for the right side of the room next door where he checks all fiction shelved under the letter S. He's waiting for what he believes will be the quintessential American experience; he's got two paperbacks out—both recent reissues—and sooner or later somebody's going to trade him in. Jonathan's

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only a couple of years older than I am. Will that mean he's made it or been judged obsolescent, to be traded in? What was a joke at first no longer is and instead of saving himself the trouble and asking me he goes to the S's—simple, near-bottomless pride, of course, keeps him away from these S-authored books on the left side of the room—and girds himself for whatever the sight of a cracked spine and smudged pages bearing his name might mean. Then he comes back into the other room for a chat.

One day a couple of years ago he memorized a poem, he claimed, especially for me.

> O God, O Venus, O Mercury, patron of thieves
> (it went),
> Give me in due time, I beseech you, a little tobacco
> shop,
> With the little bright boxes
> piled up neatly upon the shelves
> And the loose fragrant cavendish
> and the shag,
> And the bright Virginia
> loose under the bright glass cases,
> And a pair of scales not too greasy
> And the whores dropping in for a word or two in
> passing,
> For a flip word, and to tidy their hair a bit.
> O God, O Venus, O Mercury, patron of thieves,
> Lend me a little tobacco shop,
> or install me in any profession
> Save this damn'd profession of writing,
> where one needs one's brains all the time.

I knew the poem (Ezra Pound's) but had never made the association Jonathan did: the next best thing to owning a tobacco shop (pretty hard to come by these days) was owning a used bookstore. That's what Jonathan, who recited the poem in a lachrymose whiskey-baritone, all except for the last two lines which hissed, wanted: my store. Which he then wanted to

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rename: The Little Tobacco Shop. Too arty, I had said. Where was the loose fragrant cavendish, and the shag, and the bright Virginia, and the whores tidying their hair? I served plain fare here, restful on the eyes.

Back now from his fruitless search through the S's he asks, "You going?"

"I take it you mean The Rolling Stones concert?"

"Certainly."

"Not a lecture, an art opening, a game of some sort, or a reading, a play, a movie, any other sort of music."

"Nope. The Stones."

"At $17.50 a shot?"

"Whatsamatter? That good ol' bright Virginia mellow ain't movin' so well these days?"

"Not exactly. Why don't you buy an armful of books?"

"I'll buy all mine—until I decide how to dispose of them."

"Now there I might have to refuse you service."

"Charley," and Jonathan sighs deeply, moving his eyes longingly around the dusty unarranged room, "anybody ever tell you you got it made? Anybody ever tell you about the agony it took to write all these books which you can shelve and sell without ever really taking your feet down off that desk?"

"You," I say, still annoyed by this Stones craze sweeping the town. "You going?"

"I sent in my money for tickets. I'll take my chances."

"I didn't know you listened to them."

"Everybody listens to them. You can't escape them. But it's the event, man! Most of St. Louis will be squeezed into the Checkerdome. I'll write it off on my tax return."

"My son said something of the same thing."

I close up, no more than pocketing the money, turning off the lights, reversing the sign. "Your son doesn't pay taxes," Jonathan reminds me, "and neither do you, you lucky bastard." We walk up the street to his car, then drive two blocks over to Skinker and three up to a bar called Pete's. It's not far from the University and the beer's cheap, but the only time I see college students in here is late at night when they're six-pack shopping and the supermarkets are shut. Jonathan

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and I sit at the bar. Behind me at a table a shirt-sleeved man leans morosely back from a beer while the woman he's with—she's overweight and pretty, her hair has been frosted and frizzed—sucks on a swizzle stick and stares toward the door. A couple of stools down at the bar two young businessmen, both in three-piece suits but with their ties and the top buttons of their vests undone, drink quickly, rattling the ice in their glasses. They seem to be debating whether to get drunk or to go home for dinner. They talk about their wives with dreary familiarity and about other women they're either sleeping with, or might. When they get too far into the other women they remember to put in a good word again for their wives. Then they drain their drinks and ask for more. It's not impossible to believe in them, but hard enough. They don't mention The Rolling Stones. Jonathan answers a question I ask about the optioned movie-rights to one of his books, then asks me how whatshername—he knows her name—Lisa is. She's fine, I tell him, and start to say a bit more, something about how Lisa's well-being is clearly congenital since neither one job nor the next, one man nor the next, seems to affect it, but stop since Jonathan has started in about Mary, the woman he's seeing whose husband has had a change of heart and wants her back. Then I stop it altogether; our conversation threatens to fill in the gaps and complete the pauses of the one two stools down. I mention the weather, propose a drive along the park, after which Jonathan can drop me at home.

I don't like talking about the women in my life and Jonathan does. Talking women, he reminds me of men arguing politics; the outcome may not be rosy, but keeping up with the maneuvering, the intrigue, matching the fine sentiments with the guile, the arm-twisting with the stroking, can make future loss seem unimportant. "This Mary of mine," he boasts, treating the traffic along Skinker as the barest inconvenience, changing lanes by rote, "has suddenly got it all and she doesn't know how to enjoy it. You know why? It scares her. She can go red in the face dreaming about the day she's got that husband of hers on his knees, and not believe it when she sees it. Actually he's not on his knees. . . he's been decent about it, but he's

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begging and it scares her. If she'll come back and live with him she can keep seeing me. Fine, I say. Let him eat his humble pie with a knife, fork and napkin. You can cook for him, can't you? She looks at me like she's just caught a glimpse of an incredible James Bond-mobile speeding by—and she's in it. It scares her now. . . but the day that it doesn't. . . Ahhh. . . '' He breaks into a broad, relishing grin. His jowly face, pink-splotched and not very healthy, records a series of tremors then erupts in a yahooing laugh. He's happy for her, can't wait for the rest of the show. Out to my right the last light of the afternoon spreads in a pale golden wash over the grass of Forest Park's ninth fairway, a gentle soaring uphill shot to the green. There's a twosome rushing to get done. Just as Jonathan laughs for his mistress Mary's good fortune, an iron flashes at the apogee of its swing.

I live in a four-story brick building three house-lots long, on a street that loops back on itself and forbids through-traffic. Three years ago I had a roommate, a graduate student at the University, who offered me shelter when I left Barbara and Nick, and then left me the apartment itself when he went off to do junior college teaching in western Pennsylvania. The things on the walls—Klee and Picasso prints, a poster from a Monet exhibit at the museum, high-luster photographs of Henry Moore's elephant bone sculptures, and another photograph by Joel Meyerowitz of the downtown arch—belonged to him. The arch photo, campily posed, looks like a painting, but the arch is real. Lisa works there, giving out information in a booth or riding tourists up in the elevator for a view from the top. I've never taken that ride but from that 60-story height with a good naked eye you should be able to see ten miles or so out into the Illinois cornfields, upriver to the Missouri and downriver to Crystal City; and then west, to these enormous parks and these snug, gated pockets of residences, called Northmoor, Southmoor, Carswald, Parkview, Rosedale, Teasdale, with tree-covering so dense they might seem, even at the tag-end of autumn, small impenetrable woods; and then out to the malls and hamburger runs and the regimented rooftops of suburbia marching off the rim of the world.

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I sit on the living room sofa and out of my pocket take the day's take, $86 and change. I count out $50 to be deposited tomorrow and put $36 back in my billfold. Rent from the two rooms of my store runs just above $100; the electricity for my radio, two fluorescent lights and a space heater I keep going amounts to no more than $30 a month. For a while I kept a telephone at the store, then for a month experimented without to see if business would decline, and business didn't. For $130 a month I can make $86 a day. On an average I might use twenty of those dollars to replenish my stock. Even on mediocre days then I can clear $40 to $50 and read a couple of books. My rent and utilities here for this one bedroom apartment, with small dining room, small kitchen, small stucco-walled living room looking out from a third-story height onto rusty, disheveled elm branches, comes to just under $200. Here I have a telephone, costing another $20. $220 added to $130—for $350 I live each month and do business. Figuring $50 a day for profit, the business I do makes me $300 a week, over $1200 a month, leaving me $850 to get by on. During some months I've given Barbara as much as $200 to help out with Nick, but Barbara's earnings are higher than mine and some months I've given her nothing. She hasn't complained. We are friends. Unlike Jonathan she isn't a fan of mine—she disapproves, in a word, of the plainness of my existence—but we occasionally spend an evening together and except for rare exceptions conclude the evening in bed. Almost a year and a half ago Barbara had an affair with a computer technician of some sort but it didn't last long and I honestly believe that since then she has slept with no one but me. Our sex, spaced at such intervals, has gotten better—or rather more reliable. In the four years since our breakup Barbara has regulated her life, put to rest some girlish dreams. Having sex with her now means making contact with all of her, which is mysterious enough, I guess, and yet, in the after-act, given the limits she's set for herself, and her vigilance in enforcing them, dull. When she became a mysterious, self-collected person she became dull. Something to gaze at and admire like those mountains she grew up under. But she's right about me: my life *is* plain. I have few wants—one of which is Barbara her-

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self every month or so, and another of which is Lisa, whom I share with a man named Ted Gurnsey, eight years my junior and more Lisa's athletic age.

Right now I want neither. I go into the kitchen, take the leftovers from a casserole out of the refrigerator and put them into the oven. I also take lettuce, celery, radishes, carrots and one bruised tomato out of the vegetable drawer and arrange them on the counter beside the sink. There's time before the casserole warms and I'm back, with a glass of beer, on the sofa, the fifty dollars still laid out on the cloudy-grained coffee table at my knees. But sitting there, it's as if only a shadowy part of me has gotten up and gone to the kitchen, set out the dinner and brought back this beer. The rest has remained right here with the money, which I now notice I have divided into two piles. Divided and divisiveness—and I think of Nick's new word. This meager whorish hoarding. The two piles contain amounts of fifteen and thirty-five dollars and I know without figuring that the thirty-five is just enough for two tickets to see The Rolling Stones.

I make enough, don't I?

▼

Two other things I've noticed about American detectives: they dislike answering questions and they hold the local police in contempt—all except for Ellery Queen whose hapless father is one. As a consequence, they frequently end up spending a day or two in jail accused of the very crime they've been hired to solve. Their employers then lose patience with them and threaten to cut them off. But these stays in jail almost always occur in the second half of the novel when Charles or Marlowe or Archer knows too much to be left there for long. These are lonely men, proud and quarrelsome men, desperate men with special desperate needs, and time and again they must be sprung.

For the past three days Nick has not come by the store after school. The Checkerdome has announced that seating capacity for the Stones' concert will be set at 17,000 and the Post Office, adding extra workers, has already received and delivered over 40,000 pieces of Stones-related mail. Since each letter writer

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may request as many as four tickets and since many undoubtedly did, only a small fraction of the people who want to attend this concert will get the chance. I am not among them—Tuesday's take finally going back into one pile and into the bank. But now it is Friday, and Nick, even if his mother gave him permission to go ahead and spend his money, must know the odds. It's got to be killing him. It's all the city's talking about. Today in Social Studies Mrs. Newberry surely felt herself to be a prophet, which simply means she probably spent another period prophesizing some more and that a high percentage of her class, either denied by their parents or frightened by the odds, knew themselves to be excluded. Horribly excluded. Among the unchosen. The Biblical rhetoric and the Biblical parallels must have caused them to squirm at their desks. There is little doubt that something extraordinary, if not supernatural is taking place. I hear Stones' songs now wherever I go. They might as well be coming out of trees and passing clouds and heads of lettuce in the vegetable market around the corner; maybe with a funky mocking throb out of my mustiest books. When WBCU, St. Louis's oldest classical music station, began to play them, something akin to a rule of nature was broken. I am not quite sure, for instance, that that dog that just trotted by my window didn't have his lips furled back in imitation of Mick Jagger and that "start me, start me up, I'll never stop, never stop" wasn't burbling darkly out of his mouth. I hear it from somewhere, and my radio is off. Maybe it *is* just a catchy tune and I am caught. But I keep thinking of a camping trip that Barbara and I took years ago before Nick was born and of a wind that began to blow up the lake toward the knoll we were camped on, a wind that did not rise and fall, did not abate, but for maybe a minute (although it seemed much longer) swelled in intensity until it swept our picnic table clean (we were having supper) and blew our tent into the lake and blew us into a state of awareness where we realized at once, and very lucidly, how insubstantial the things were we'd pinned our hopes on—even our lives. Then we snapped out of it and hustled around salvaging what we could. A tornado, we learned later, had cut a swath one valley over and we'd had a brush with its fringe. I remem-

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ber the swelling and swelling of that wind, unnatural, too prolonged a blow, and the sensation I had of being physically, and philosophically, stripped.

Before I go out with Lisa I call my ex-wife. Not tonight, she says, before I have a chance to get started. The week has worn her out. By working twelve hours a day they've just managed to get an issue out on time. Maybe dinner tomorrow night. Sunday might be even better. I don't commit myself. Barbara is an editor of a demographics magazine that began modestly and, for lack of real competition, scored an immediate success. She and fellow-editors follow men and money as they track each other over the map, study birth rates under various conditions to predict the numbers and location of the mass unborn. I congratulate her on getting the issue out on time. It wasn't dinner and its aftermath that I was calling about.

"I haven't seen Nick in three days."

"Nick's all right," she says.

"He always comes by the store after school."

She draws a breath, a deep one, which she will measure out for as long as this conversation lasts. Her telephone voice is close to a drawl. "He's upset with you," she says.

"He was snotty," I reply.

"Eleven-year-olds frequently get that way."

"Still. . ."

"Yes?" she finally inquires after letting me chew on it for a good long time.

"I don't know," I say. "It's all this madness about The Rolling Stones. Why in the world Mrs. Newberry would get them all fired up about that—"

Now she does cut me off. "Nick really wants to go. He thinks you didn't see the seriousness of his point of view."

"The seriousness of his point of view?"

"Yes," Barbara says dryly.

"Do *you* see it?"

"Of course I do," she says, and the chair she was lounging in she's now sat up in. I can hear it in her voice.

"Barbara, do you remember when The Rolling Stones were fighting it out with The Beatles back in the lurid dark-days of

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the 60's? Do you remember how contemptuous they seemed of everything—no, how contemptuous they *were*? Do you?''

''They've changed,'' she replies crisply and at once. Then adds, ''They were never that bad anyway.''

''They were bad, they were contemptuous, let's don't kid ourselves about that.'' I'm beginning to heat up. I measure a breath out myself. And because I don't fully believe what I'm saying and because finally it's not even The Rolling Stones that I'm talking about I feel something like a chunk of me break off and drift out to where it will take the current or tide of another thought to bring me back to full strength. ''All that's happened,'' I resume, hear myself say, ''is that we've gotten used to that kind of contempt and callousness and made it part of our lives.''

I sound doleful. At the center of my voice there's a thin solemn shudder, which if I can hear, she, my ex-wife, the woman once attuned to the finest shift in my tone, can hear like a drum. She decides to go easy on me. ''Charley,'' she says, ''you're overdramatizing.''

Maybe all that's happened in the eleven years since our marriage is that most people—she, not I—have developed stronger stomachs for the contempt and that the species—Nick included—has evolved accordingly.

''Could be,'' I allow.

''So don't.''

''Still, I don't want him to go.''

''I don't much want him to go either but I'm going to take him if my tickets come in.''

''You what? You are?''

''Everybody at the office sent in for four. If only one of us gets lucky that won't help Nick, but if two of us do then, sure, I'll take him along.''

''Put a gas mask on him.''

''He's smelled pot before.''

''He won't be smelling it, he'll be swimming in it down there.''

''Charley, Nick has already had it offered to him at school and he's turned it down. I wouldn't worry.''

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"It's not just the pot."

"What is it then?"

"It's that whole tribal, orgiastic, mind-blowing, flesh-tearing, idolatrous madness!" I say windily and windedly, then stop. Suddenly I want to hang up. I'm tired of this, tired of myself, and I know that something is deeply wrong.

"It's just a concert," Barbara replies allayingly, as she would to her son at an even younger age. Just a dream, Nickie. Oh, just a dream, Mommie? OK, that explains it.

"It's The Rolling Stones!" I exclaim.

Barbara groans and the end of the groan she bites off, like a snarl. Her good humor and her patience have just run out. "You've got no right telling me how to raise my son—since you turned your back on him."

I protest, not very vigorously. "We've been through all this—"

"Shut up, Charley." Then in a cold, deliberately-paced tone she says, "I sometimes think you've got no right talking to me about Nickie at all since if it had been up to you I would never have had him."

And that isn't true. But the truth is too confused to recall clearly and she's remembered it the way she wants. The fact is we didn't know what to do with him, with *it*, Barbara's pregnancy. Each day we postponed making up our minds. In 1969 the whole country was coming apart and there was plenty to occupy our minds without thinking about it, what we would go days without mentioning. She's embarrassed to recall it as it was. A shameful and cowardly version which, when we could no longer evade, we went ahead and had—it, our son. And I think that the reason she's misremembered it to her advantage is because our attitude toward her pregnancy typified our attitude toward everything else back then. We went to bed on our first date because the times seemed to have pushed us in that direction and that was where we fell. Further dates and further sessions in bed told us we were neither compatible nor incompatible, nothing to get undressed for, to map out a future for, but, yes, better than the absolute antagonism that ruled almost everywhere else we looked. We couldn't decide whether to live

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together or not, to be literature graduate students or not, to protest the war and defy the Johnson administration or not. We weren't without conscience or values, but the stridency and furor of the times seemed to drown our voices out and we just couldn't make ourselves heard. Not even to each other. So the pregnancy dragged on until the decision was taken from us and Nick was born. Then, at about then, the marriage which we did decide upon, but accepted as a sort of consolation prize for all that we'd forfeited on before. And it felt like that. But that's not the way she'll remember it because of the fundamental changes she's made since then. Healed and whole, as sensibly motivated as if she'd sat down and had a long, indoctrinating chat with herself, she simply will not be able to recall the woman she once was. So she blames it on me, and somehow I admire her for it. I admire her commitment to her own defense.

"I hope Nick didn't hear you say that," I say.

She says he didn't. She says he's in his room and that she is in the kitchen, standing all this while. Beside the refrigerator. On her strong, shapely knees, on her own two feet. Everyone who knows her says the last four years have brought her beauty out, and I agree. I picture the sun on that alpine snow, the lovely gun-metal blue of the rock underneath. Her eyes can sometimes reach that shade of blue, there at the height of her passion. "Hang up," she says. No use arguing about it until they get the tickets, and I admit that makes sense.

So I hang up and immediately—I have just slumped back onto the sofa, slumping deeply to find the spring to jump up and go out—recall that latest turn of events regarding Jonathan and his rags-to-riches girlfriend, Mary. I've only met her once. She seemed tired then, pretty, undecided and brittle. She had gray under her eyes and her eyes had a startled shine. She spent the hour we were together sidling up close to what she must have thought was the lee side of Jonathan, then suddenly shying away. Now she has her chance. Yes, now like Barbara she's in a position to change her life, tip all the scales back in her favor. Jonathan would seem to be her coach and most privileged spectator. He's given her strength, or, what's just as like-

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ly, he's had her while her husband was losing his. Now he's giving her up, unveiling her like a magnificently rebuilt weapon. But no more magnificent than Barbara—I can feel confident of that. She fascinates him and Barbara fascinates me. But it's not the same.

Why isn't it?

He can't tell you. If he and Jonathan both stand back while Barbara and Mary come into their own, he wants to know, disregarding differences of degree, where the differences of kind lie. He doesn't know. He just knows it doesn't ring right. In that instant nothing does, nothing except this sense of shadowy diminution he feels, as though the drift of the city west took a barely perceptible part of him with it, then came back and for each insensible surge took a little bit more. But that's me talking, not him.

Eventually he gets up and drives approximately four miles south to Maplewood, a community of blue-collar workers, of discount houses and depressed smaller stores. The night has turned sharply cool. His eight-year-old microbus runs well but gives only a meager heat to the area around his legs. By the time he reaches Lisa Vitali's apartment he's fighting off chills. She's going to be late—the bathrobe and unmade-up face, boyish and bony, but still pretty, the dark almond eyes softening every hard line, tell him that. She does too. Smelling of lemony bath soap she kisses him hurriedly, misses the mouth, and, laughing, bounces off on the balls of her bare feet to the bathroom, inquiring as she goes if it's the first or second showing they want to make. The movie they've decided on is *True Confessions*. It's about the corruption of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, southern California style, and Lisa, a still-practicing Catholic from a family of five brothers, two sisters, a mother and a stricken father, seems anxious to get a glimpse behind the scenes. She'll hurry. He tells her, shuddering lightly, they might as well wait for the second showing and take their time. Then he steps fully into her apartment, her life, and it's like moving from one element to another, this going from Barbara to Lisa. Her walls are full of shiny, sentimental things—yellow and tangerine-colored daisies with their petals rounded like

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raindrops; day-glo paintings of large-headed children; small oval mirrors framed in plastic scrolls. There are plants, ferns and philodendron, hanging in macramé pouches. A mobile of silver paper fishes over the stereo dips and turns in the air he's let in from the front door. On the coffee table, beside a sprig of cloth flowers, an aromatic candle shaped like an apple gives off a waxy candied odor that overpowers, but essentially restates, the odor of synthetic surfaces everywhere he looks. He walks (the carpet is a golden shag) to the first cabinet of the alcove that houses the kitchen and inspects the bottles she's stored there. The picture of a Mexican snoozing beneath a cactus catches his eye and he takes down the bottle of tequila. The burn is raw in his throat, but the aftertaste is interesting—medicinal, he thinks—and carrying the bottle and a shot glass with him he goes to the sofa whose pattern is made up of brown-and-gold, orchid-lipped flowers and tendrils curling through the off-white spaces in between. He drinks another shot of tequila. Lemon and salt, he remembers, but makes no effort to get up. There's a matching, high-backed armchair to his right; the light he's sitting in comes from the kitchen directly before him and from a pencil-orange lamp with a sharply fluted shade on the table at the far end of the sofa. At the near end is the stereo, and beside it a low bookcase with paperbacks occupying half the top shelf (he knows the authors, brought her most of the books, could probably tell you which of the fat best sellers she's failed to finish and shelved) and records wedged in at a near-vertical angle below. Hot in the stomach, barely noticeable at his extremities, the tequila has reconnoitered his body now and established a temporary control over his chills. He has one more shot and the battle, he thinks, is won—but he could never reconstruct Lisa Vitali from what he sees in her living room. From the bathroom he hears the water which has been falling out of a spray-softened jet into a plastic basin stop, and then a medicine cabinet open with a squeak. He hears Lisa's hand searching among her things. It's a slender, blue-veined hand, utterly unnicked or scarred, and could belong to an artist. But doesn't. Lisa's an artist only at not letting her life back her into a corner. She's an artist under

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and over you in bed—making love like a swimmer frolicking in water—and in moving from one man in her life to the next. But not in producing works of art. In a family as large as hers she must have learned at an early age to play favorites among her brothers, and he can account for her regret-free movement among her lovers now by remembering that brother-sister quarrels rarely last long, almost never leave scars. A man similarly on the move might meet up with her many times in the course of a lifetime—might or might not. Yet he's not satisfied. It's the way she is, but that doesn't explain it. Love—he mouths the word, knows he does not, not her, at any rate, but wonders how long she can keep the very nature of her affections fluid, how long before something happens to hold her to one spot. Not yet—he swings his gaze from the door he came in by around the room to the stereo on his immediate left—not here.

He drinks one more shot—his fourth. Just a sec, a sec, she calls moving from the bathroom to her bedroom.

Under a smoky-gray plastic top he sees a stack of three or four records ready to be released onto the turntable of the stereo. He decides to release them himself and is willing to bet—in fact makes a not altogether disinterested wager with himself—that the first of those records will be The Rolling Stones' latest album. When it is not he forces himself to listen closely to what's being sung in payment for his losing bet. The voice is a man's and there's a full rock band behind him, yet the music is mainly mournful, rhythmic and celebratory only in the refrains. In a sort of reflective croon the singer addresses his newborn son:

Stay where you are, my baby boy,
I have you on my knees
You don't see me—
I'm only a shadow when you open your eyes—
But I see you and there's where you want to be.

Because none of it's happened
Nothing's gone wrong

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You're as clean as the rainfall
Bright as the night
You're where we all want to be.

I can't go to you so you'll come to us—
Why will you hurry so?
I'll tell you the places you'll have to pass
It's a route we've all traveled and can't retrace
We know every stop by heart—the hearts we have lost
on the way.

Because none of it's happened. . .

You'll learn how to tease and we'll show you off
You'll learn how to hide what you feel
You'll grow up and love—
Love's gentle and fierce, a heaven in hell—
So frightened, you'll learn how to doubt,
To live with your doubt you'll learn how to kill
And blood will mean money, you'll see.
You must come to us—only the mad and the poets
return.
Your father's not mad, my poems blink on and off like
a ship in a storm at sea.

Should I hope you learn your lessons well?

No, stay where you are,
Stay where you are,
Because none of it's happened
Nothing's gone wrong
You're clean as the rainfall
Bright as the night
You're where we all want to be.

As the second cut on the record is about to begin I reach over and—bet made good—lift off the player arm. Lisa has come in. She's dressed in designer jeans, a silky white blouse with a long pointed collar, and a tweedy-gray sport coat, patched on the elbows. It's the outfit of the day—on her with her bobbed hair

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and catch-me-if-you-can grin it looks gay and devious, subtly sexed, unencumbering.

"Tequila?" she says. "I didn't know you drank tequila. Want me to make some margaritas?"

"*I* didn't know you knew how."

"The bartender at La Cucaracha taught me."

"No, I've had enough. Did you hear that song?"

" 'Where We All Wanna Be'?"

I nod my head. "Who's the singer?"

"Lee Rossner." She starts to hum the song and for a moment lets her body sway in time to its brooding beat; then a faster beat comes along and her blue-clad hips flip around inside her sports coat. "There're better songs," she says, "on the other side."

I nod again.

The beat she's caught and moves to stops. "Did *you* hear—" she breaks in excitedly on herself.

"Yes," I break in on her, "The Rolling Stones are coming to town."

"Did you—?"

"No, and I'm not. Did you?"

"No, but—" and starts to blurt something out before stopping herself. That's unlike her. There's not much she's reluctant to say. She picks up another beat from the air—probably The Stones this time. "Ted did," she admits. "Ted's trying to get tickets."

"I hope he hits," I say.

We go out. The fact that Ted has offered to pay the price and take her to The Rolling Stones concert does not offend me in the least. And I'm glad to see that she's gotten over her discomfort in telling me so. I don't know why she hesitated in the first place unless she thought I would be upset by the news, and if that's the case, she simply doesn't know me. As I don't quite—to my satisfaction—know her. Unless she's just that, just that assortment of beats, enthusiasms, new drinks, albums, outfits, decorative motifs, hesitations and recoveries. The movie, in a mall complex of six theaters she doesn't think much of, the priest, played by Robert DeNiro, spending far too

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much time searching his conscience and not turning up anything terribly exciting or moving. In the long silent stretches of DeNiro's introspection we hear bombs and guns and war whoops from the theater next door where *Raiders of the Lost Ark* continues to pack them in. I agree with Lisa's assessment of the film. Afterwards, as we make our way out of the parking lot, I try to tell her so. I'm afraid of sounding patronizing. Her instinct for it was absolutely sound; they wrapped it up impressively, designing it to be unwrapped. We were led to believe there'd be a kernel of evil at the center. Nothing. She's right. A waste of a couple of good men and a whole lot of dollars.

Not a big drinker, I find myself wanting another drink badly and drive us over to a spot she likes in the West End. Euclid Avenue and Maryland Plaza is an elegant-going-to-chic collection of restaurants, bars, art galleries, antique shops and bookstores. The streets leading in and out of the plaza are paved with brick. Huge, candelabra-style streetlights mark out the perimeter of the choicest area to be. Here I do have my margarita, and Lisa joins me. We are sitting in the corner of a room that is mostly taken up by a horseshoe-shaped bar around which singles are shouldering their way. Apropos of nothing—no word, no winning glance from Lisa, no sexual desire—I suddenly take her lovely hand off the table and hold it to my lips, then spread it out against the side of my face. She's been watching the parade of men, most dressed in sweaters and slacks, and women, many dressed like her, and doesn't quite know what to make of it, my gesture, or of me. I can't help her. She's pretty and friendly, she's very companionable, she comes at life easily and finds it where she expects it to be. All that I could possibly say is that I would like to be left like this, indefinitely, held out of time, with her small slender hand against my cheek and her eyes puzzled, approving and pleased, and her knee touching mine under the table until I can tell her what it is. But I feel my eyes go moist and am forced to turn away. She snuggles in close to my ear then. "Hey, Roberto DeNiro, I could go with you if you want to," she whispers, and she knows I know what she means. And maybe that *is* it. Maybe those are the words. But of course she's only helping me over a

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rough spot, out of funk, and sweet sentiments don't get tickets—she knows that as well as I do.

I take her home when we feel it's time. At the door she gives me a familiar, very economical smile, and leads me in. We kiss in the middle of the room, her hand, under my sweater, doing a prodding prance over my ribs. Then she skips off again to the bathroom. And the living room is as we left it. The bottle of tequila's out; all the records but one are ready to be released onto the turntable. Above the turntable the mobile of fish swim in new currents of air. Water is running in the bathroom and the jet is full of spray, bubbles, a small luxury anyone can afford, and not a jet at all. What are the chances what is going to happen will be any different from what has already happened many times before? What are the chances? What—and I actually say this, my voice sounding hopelessly histrionic in my ears—are the goddamn chances? What is going to happen is going to be nice, but I start with an incomprehensible anger building inside me toward the bathroom door, where I stop, making no more noise than that spray-softened jet, not enough to make myself heard. I go back to the sofa. I am about to play that song Lee Rossner sang to his son again, but pour myself another shot of tequila instead. After that I pour another and as the tequila spreads through my body and fierily restores the peace, I have a sudden intimation as to why men drink, and can see myself, unless something happens, unless something different happens, turning to drink to be able to live with myself, literally, to be able to live inside my skin.

Lisa calls to me. Wonders why I am here and not there.

I get up and go into the bedroom. The lights are out and the plasticized bureau and bedside table and headboard for the bed shine. Through the thin plaster walls I hear unintelligible voices from the apartment next door, voices, not love-sounds, some conversation moving desultorily on into the late night, and I undress, pull back the sheet and get in beside Lisa, who occupies at once the center of the bed. During our love-making there's a moment when I think I have penetrated beyond her playfulness and her seemingly insatiable taste for thrills into an area richly still, vast and electric with an amazed quiet, and for

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just an instant recognize that area, that state, substratum, whatever it is, as a place of conception and birth, but that instant passes so quickly I cannot trust my impression and I cannot find it again. Lisa comes with a sort of gleeful expiring whinny which I truly enjoy. When I let go she's waiting for me, and it's her cupped hands I picture as I pour myself out.

After dozing off I wake and think about it. But I don't get up.

I wake once more before morning. Lisa sleeps with her face turned away from me on the pillow. The sheets and pillowcases are patterned with more flowers, very small blue ones against the pale yellow of the cloth, and Lisa's head of dark hair looks like a wild and weedy growth—like an overgrown sinkhole in a neatly-kept field. I get up and turn off the living room light. I go to the bathroom. I go back and put the tequila up, then drink a glass of water. The night latch to the front door hangs unlatched and for a not-so-sleepy instant I actually stop in the middle of the living room trying to decide whether to walk to the door and fasten the chain or not; then I lose interest and go back to bed. Lisa's leg and hip are very warm and just where I left them, and I line my leg up against hers.

When I open my eyes she's standing between the bed and the sliding closet doors. The light in the room is a weak gray-and-gold. The commode has just been flushed. She's looking straight at me with her mind somewhere else. "Don't you have to open the store?" she wonders.

A part of me worried about the usually good Saturday morning sale struggles to get up, but the rest of me lies there looking at Lisa. She's naked. Her belly is tidy and glossy. The bone at the shoulder and the curve of the breast establish a sort of humble equilibrium I admire and want for myself.

"Why don't you come back to bed," I say.

A knowing, only half-absent smile appears on her lips. "I've got to see my father this morning. They're expecting me."

"Want me to come with you?"

"Sure . . . if you want to." Surprised, she's no longer got her thoughts on something else. They're on me. "That'd be nice," she says.

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"We could make up for lost time later," I suggest, not pushing it, but I do hold up the sheet in case she wants to jump back into bed or inspect what's already there.

Feigning it, she gives me a long appraising look. Then cocks her head, shuts an eye, as though deliberating. Then looks again, right at my groin, double-checking now and determined not to be duped. She lifts her eyebrows, nods shrewdly, approvingly, but already the game's gone too far for her and she's in bed beside me, rehearsing the mauling she intends to give me, her hands hovering hungrily just over my unathletic flesh, before getting down to it.

I feel better than I've felt in years. In that delicate instant, than I can remember.

Outside, under a low gray sky, cars speed east and west along Interstate 40 as I drive Lisa to see her parents. I have that sense again of a city cast adrift, like the clouds, moving at its own slow pace behind the speeding cars out toward the prairie. We turn south and drive up to a broad low eminence called The Hill where most of the Italian families in St. Louis live. The houses here are small two-story wood frame structures; there are a few compressed ranches made of brick. In many of the small yards and on some of the porches, statues of the Virgin have been set out, and the more ambitious or devout have constructed little freestanding niches or grottoes to shield the Virgin from bad weather. The Vitalis' stands out by itself like a birdbath. I notice grass growing up around the base. She's a tall, slender, plaster-white young woman, her garments flowing off her in long eroded folds.

Inside there are more religious statuettes, and crucifixes, and small devotional paintings and bric-a-brac. The children are all gone now, and I simply cannot imagine what it must have been like with ten living under this roof at once. Even if the basement and attic were habitable I still cannot imagine so much life—no, not life, I mean lives, so many differently constituted, private and opaque lives—held here together, in such tight suspension. Mr. Vitali sits in his wheelchair next to the blank screen of the television. His left side is completely paralyzed; he gets some use from his right arm and the right side of his face is

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capable of anxious, twitching expressions. Mrs. Vitali sees to him, and to Lisa, and to me (she sits me down, tells me it's coffee I want to drink) in a stunned and sweet-natured manner that I admire at once. I don't know how else she would get through her day. While Lisa talks to her father I watch her mother through the open door to the kitchen. Lisa is telling her father about work, the weather, about the movie we saw last night, about anything that might get his attention and keep his spirits up, about the sensation already caused by The Rolling Stones' announced visit, and Mrs. Vitali is standing before her stove in a black sweater and a gray smock watching the water boil. As far as I can tell she has not slipped into a daze, gone to sleep on her feet. She is actually watching the water boil in a small battered saucepan, her attention, I believe, moving from one area of the water's surface to another, as if to coax the bubbles equitably up from the bottom. It occurs to me that Lisa has some of her mother's easy absorption in the small things of her world, and if she lives thirty-five more years and gives birth to an enormous family she may have a lot.

The coffee is not very good. After Mrs. Vitali serves me she sits down across from her daughter to listen in on what Lisa has left to tell. Two of Lisa's brothers come in, one, Georgie, a balding, heavyset man a couple of years younger than me, I've already met. The other's name is Mike. He's muscular and swarthy and closer to Lisa's age. Before they've gotten their coats off they've instructed their mother not to move, insisted they aren't hungry or thirsty and have come only to talk to Papa; so once they're seated there are six of us in this small room smelling of cooking oil, stale upholstery and stuffing, five of whom are looking at the sixth, who can only blink and twitch. After both Georgie and Mike compliment their father on how well he's looking, how straight he's sitting up, Georgie in an expansive, over-loud voice begins to boast about his son Johnny's accomplishments in soccer. Lisa tries to get her father to look at Georgie who is exclaiming three goals, Papa, three, then holding up three meaty fingers into what he hopes will become his father's line of sight. But Mr. Vitali's one live eye seems stubbornly fixed on Lisa. Mrs. Vitali shakes her head.

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Never really rising to full height, Georgie heaves out of his chair and swings over to crouch behind Lisa, holding his three fingers up just over her right shoulder, repeating three, Papa, three! Then Lisa tries, speaking very deliberately and taking nothing for granted. Your grandson, Johnny. . . Georgie's son, Johnny. . . scored three goals in a soccer game last. . . when, Georgie? . . . Saturday, Papa. . . last Saturday, Papa. That's a lot. Georgie's really proud of him. When the old man's blurred brown eye fails to do anything but blink uninterestedly Mike gets up and goes to stand behind Georgie where he says it all in Italian. "*Gianni ha segnato tre gols in una sola partita!*" What seems perfectly clear to me doesn't seem to occur to any of them. If Mr. Vitali has understood, he's understood from the beginning. If he's understood and doesn't want to show it, it's because he has no time left for such things as soccer heroics. Or maybe for his grandsons. Or for that matter maybe not even for his sons and his daughter. I look carefully at his stricken, white-stubbled face and it's possible to read almost anything in the half-faced look he's fixed on Lisa. A deep, wearily deep indifference; a trapped and wearily deep plea. But the three of them have somehow made it their business to get this information about Johnny's goals across and they now call on their mother to come stand beside them. When she finally does she shows a flash of her impatience. "Three goals, Gianni, your grandson made!" she barks in his face. "*Tre gols!*" and waving them all, her husband included, away, she mutters, "*Basta*," and sits back down.

Leaving, out on the porch, I wonder how many sons and daughters and grandchildren it would have taken before they realized that Mr. Vitali was simply unapproachable on the subject of Johnny's goals. I tell Lisa I had a vision of all her brothers and sisters crowded into the small living room, all screaming and shaking three fingers at the old man, as if they were frantically bidding on stock.

"What an ordeal," I say.

"No," she says, and stopping on the walk down to the car, emphatically shakes her head. "If we'd all been there Papa would have listened. He would have been able to under-

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stand."

"Didn't you get the impression he was feeling hemmed in and was resisting because you wouldn't let him breathe?"

"He could breathe. He would have breathed better if we'd all been there together. You're just imagining, Charley. You don't know what life in a large family is like."

"You're saying there weren't enough of you to . . . to give the matter sufficient importance?" I ask, amused and amazed.

"Something like that. There were only Georgie and Mike and me."

"That's *all* there were in my family. A brother and a sister."

"So you don't know what it's like." She runs around to the other side of the microbus and hops into the front seat. The first fine drops of rain start to fall. "Like I said, you're just imagining how you would feel if you were Papa."

I admit the possibility, and then for a moment I try, I actually try to imagine myself confined like Lisa's father to a wheelchair and a small cluttered house, living in a neighborhood of grieving plaster Virgins on a bare hill drifting west, being talked to, pleaded with by a daughter and two sons, and being observed by the man (one of the men) the daughter shares her youthful body with, myself a body of dead weight, dimming sight, indifference like a physical and mental gel over which flickers an occasional spent hope—and I can't exclude the possibility, not yet knowing how to read these clues into the future, I can't exclude the possibility that that's who I'll become. But that won't be Lisa's father, Signor Vitali. That'll be—Lisa's point—me.

I drive us over to Forest Park and in the light rain we follow the forking, twisting looping park roads. I've never measured Forest Park from one end to the other—for the very good reason that that's rarely how I drive it—but it must extend three to four miles. It's maybe a mile and a half wide. The 1904 World's Fair was held here and some of the buildings and pavilions from that time remain. But the majority, and the most palatial among them, were made of plaster of Paris, and when the fair was over and all the countries had gone home, they were bulldozed away. From the dusty fairgrounds and the

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limey rubble grass grew, golf courses were created. A spacious zoo was built on a hill. A planetarium. The art museum—one of the original buildings—dominates half the park and King Louis IX, a saint among his countrymen, sits on his horse and commands the vistas as if all that he beheld swore fealty to his shrewd and benevolent rule. I drive us past his statue, on around the zoo, and down onto the flatlands where the golf courses and sports fields and the park's many pools are located. In this seasonably cool and gray weather the trees have finally begun to shed the most late-changing of their leaves and it's oak leaves, a dull reddish-brown, that I see quickly covering the pools' surfaces, blowing out over the water like tillerless boats in the breeze that accompanies the rain.

Lisa, who has lived within walking distance of this park almost all her life, never seems bored by these half-hours we spend here, driving in loose and tightening loops until we've been over most of the roads. I like it because it *is* a motorist's park (for those who want to stroll, there's Tower Grove to the southeast) and in half an hour at a slow cruising speed you can cover it all. When the whole world was represented here in 1904 you could have covered the world in much the same way. Something of that concentrated, all-inclusive sense of things remains. Perhaps these curving roads are best understood as the whorls of the world's navel, the world as it was known and assembled in 1904. We follow them around, we go down, and then, of course, we stop. It is 1981. The world's body is plugged up. Only a few old men with metal detectors and earphones to listen to the beep of what's down there and garden trowels to dig it up can make it any farther than we can in our cars. They call themselves the "Coin-shooters of St. Louis" and the park authorities dislike them so much because they are worse on the golf courses than dogs. But they're out in all weather. Today in this November rain as we leave the park and head south on Skinker I see one digging in the rough of the ninth fairway, and I point him out to Lisa. He wears a huge weathered pad on his left knee, the knee he kneels on after he's made his find and started to dig. He's digging right now as we pass him, and although old and arthritic—he may be as old as

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Lisa's father, left sitting beside his television, staring into the space his daughter gave up to go off with me—he's chopping through grass and pulling back turf with a mounting excitement, not unlike when a digging dog knows he's close to the bone.

We proceed up Skinker for two more blocks and then with no reason not to, with a barely conscious homing turn of the wheel, I turn us on to Trenton and drive two more blocks down to my store. I ask Lisa if she wants to get a book and she tells me she hasn't finished those I've already given her. Do I want to open up? It's noon. Most stores, I point out to her, if they're going to do half-day business on Saturday do the first half. When, she wants to know, have I done business like anyone else? and she smiles at me and cuts that last bit of distance our misunderstanding about her family has left between us. She kisses me on the cheek, calls me a gloomy goofball. That's a new one, although squarely within her range. I laugh and tell her the gloomy goofball is in *there*, and I point at the window where from our line of sight the "Closed" sign hangs just above his head as he sits at his desk, feet propped up, feeding on a book, like a man with a bottomless stomach or a craving for a food he's yet to find. His store is filling up fast—used books like dirty dishes, and he hasn't washed in years. Instead he sells them, all of them, both those on the right and those on the left side of the room, although not one has ever satisfied his hunger. Yes, books like dirty dishes, crusted with his leavings, smeared with the senselessness of his fast feed. Little wonder his friend Jonathan Sheraton dreads the day. Nonetheless, he sells them all. No way to run a business, no way to treat your fellowman.

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But on Monday he's back. Sunday afternoon as usual he's read through the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* classifieds for anything that smells of books—garage and yard and block sales, must-move empty-the-apartment sales, liquidations, auctions, closeouts—and marked three for late in the upcoming week. The secret is to get there first and offer with a single large bill (a $10 or a $20) to buy the whole lot. The real secret is to see

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through the cramped, boxed print of the want-ad to the garage, basement or attic in question. He's discovered, for instance, that people who list their books next to their clothes have good books, usually well-preserved; books between car parts and lawn tools have probably been kept in a damp basement; books beside TV's are almost always westerns or trashy romances. Yes, Sunday afternoon he's picking his shots and Monday morning he's on the job, knowing no other way except the part-time teaching of Freshman English to make a living. When he was in high school and during the summers of his undergraduate days he worked in his father's wholesale paper and janitorial supply company, unloading and delivering stock, routing out invoices, running down late accounts. He worked beside his father as his father, a humorless, unrelenting man, worked himself to death, did it almost obscenely right before his son's eyes. "When she floats we'll float with her," was his tight-lipped dream of the future. He fell over waiting in line at the bank, a grim and stagey death. His wife ran the business, and ran it well, until her second son, Joey, could graduate from college and do it for her, freeing her to run everything else. But unlike her husband she knew when to write a proposition off as lost, and she gave up on her eldest son when she saw he'd come to a full stop in a career for which no jobs were available, and no real significant advancement possible even if he found one. Charley Simmons gave up on her, the family, Madisonville, Indiana, when he returned for his father's funeral and like a sentimental dope visited the warehouse he'd spent after-school hours and hot summers inside. The thin, slightly mangy smell of cardboard cartons (towels, tissue, napkins, cups) trapped in that heat, beneath the rackety groan of that tin roof, was the smell and sound of his father, all that was left of him, the ghost he'd become, and his oldest son didn't go back.

Not really. A few brief, stay-in-touch visits with his mother, brother, nephew and niece, but in on one breath and out on the other, under, it seems now, the cover of night. Books, his mother had begun to muse, used books to occupy the nation's increasingly impoverished free time. Something he can sit on

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while no one else is going anywhere either. Gradually she'd begun to interest herself once again in his well-being—both as a son and a mildly curious phenomenon. But not so much that she'd take a loss on it. She never got entirely rid of the ironic gleam in her blue eyes, or the fine, measuring grin at the corner of her mouth that could, if the occasion demanded, become a room-clearing laugh. She wore her hair stylishly short and frosted. In the five years since her husband had died she hadn't aged one day. He wondered if she would remarry, then wondered, with bitter amusement, what kind of settlement it would take. A matriarch should have something to lord over (a perfect lady she'd never be), and that was her sadness, for in reality she had nothing, not her son Joey, who had firm and intelligent control of the store, not her daughter and son-in-law in Syracuse who were also self-sufficient and lived too far away, and not her son, Charley, except in the form of a sober-seeming, speculative jest, which became for her, her tone, and finally, perhaps, the version of herself she knew best. One in every family, she'd shake her head, one generation in every four, she'd somehow determined, and yet. . . yet. . . maybe if he sat there long enough and didn't move, something else would (she meant here the depressed economy), and he could, in effect, back in the back door. Then she would smile, satisfied, having staged it to her liking, but it was not a matter for smiles, for longstanding, speculative jests. A man had to live. He never told that to her quite as bluntly as he told it to himself, because a woman had to live too, and he, for the moment at least, was her livelihood, the life she could map out with matriarchal good humor and keep her self-image intact.

But a man did. He returns to his store on Monday because a man has to. He sells $76 worth of books, three customers coming back after unsuccessful attempts on Saturday. He reads more detective novels, Archie Goodwin fronting for Nero Wolfe and shielding Wolfe from some pretty troubling facts, not about the criminals he catches by barely stirring from his chair, but about the peculiar sort of nourishment he gets from Goodwin after Goodwin has filtered off the grossest impurities from that world outside. The world outside, on Tuesday after-

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noon, brings him his son, who's sheepishly contrite but from a position of strength, not weakness.

"Your mother lucked out, didn't she?" his father surmises.

"Lucked out?" Nick plays it dumb.

"She got the tickets, didn't she, Nick?"

"The tickets? Oh, yeah. Yeah, she got 'em. They're way up in the balcony, though."

"Don't guess you wanna sit that far away." He's sparring with his son, eyeing him combatively, but from a position of weakness, not strength.

"Lots of people didn't get tickets at all."

"Guess you'd just as soon turn your ticket over to someone who wouldn't mind sitting a mile away."

"Dad. . ."

"Because those way back in the back won't feel 'united' like those up front. Back in the back you might feel left out. How's Mrs. Newberry getting along?"

"Mrs. Newberry?"

"Your Social Studies teacher. Did *she* get tickets?"

"I don't know. She didn't say. We have Social Studies *tomorrow*!"

"Wouldn't that be something if *she* got left out!"

"Dad. . ." and he sighs heavily, shakes his head. As if to emphasize the weight of it, the weight of what he's going to say, he swings his backpack off the desk and slowly lowers it to the floor. "Mom said I could go. She said she wanted to take me. She said for you to call her if there's anything you want to talk over. She said this is a good week."

"Nick. . ." and he gets his son's head up. The blue eyes are cautious and tired and confused, tired of his father's confusion, eager for the day when they can slough off this weighty watchfulness and take the world as offered, father included. "Did your mother send you over here?"

"I was coming anyway," he says, starts to insist, and insisting to whine, but catches himself and adds instead, lamely, "I really was."

He does his job, he stays put, he sells his books. Under $60 on Tuesday and a slow start on Wednesday, but he thinks he

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understands. His customers have to scrape together all the money they can to pay for their concert tickets. Jesus Christ. $17.50. After 18 years. The Rolling Stones. Nick comes back, feeling better with nothing now to hide. While he's there a Stones' song comes on the radio and his father, feeling detached, unaccountable, coldly curious, turns it up louder and instructs his son to listen. Nick does, dutifully, as though in church, and only when the song is nearly over does he lower his guard and react to the beat. By then, of course, it is too late, and his father, feeling guilty now, searches both the AM and the FM band for another Stones' song without success. Now when he wants them they won't be had. He catches sight of them, though, running from tree to tree in Forest Park, Mick Jagger sticking out his tongue and then withdrawing it slowly through red rubbery lips, savoring himself, while his sidekick, Keith Richards, spectral eyes, teeth, hair, grins like one of the contentedly damned from the other side of the tree. What is he doing to his son? What is he doing to himself? When Jonathan comes in he's got a story to tell. Mistress Mary has indeed gone back to her husband, that's the expected news. But by reading to her from one of the less desirable sections of Jonathan's novels her husband's convinced her that the author is an incorrigible egotist and that she shouldn't go back to him—that's the bad. The expected and the good is that Jonathan's tickets to the Stones concert came through and that here, free of charge, in honor of the best little tobacco shop in St. Louis, if nothing else, is one for Charley if he'd like to see what all the excitement's about. Then Jonathan slaps the ticket down on the desk and goes off to check the S's. Back at the desk he moans, "Her old man will be trading me in. As soon as he's sure he's got her convinced, he won't have me around the house—you'll see. Charley, I want those books! I want to retire them!"

The ticket, after all the craziness, all the hype, is disarmingly plain. The Rolling Stones, the date, seat, and price appear in computer print-out over a background of pink scored with hair-thin, zigzagging green lines. He sits there for a long, reflective moment with the ticket in his hand. When he was fourteen he was hit in the head with a golf ball, shot at close range. At the

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hospital the nurses stuck brightly marked pins under his scalp, and, when he'd begun to register on their encephalogram, called in the doctor to read the results. That's what those green lines look like—that reading of his brain. He puts the ticket in the desk drawer, under the day's take. When he pockets the money at the end of the afternoon he leaves the ticket. The next day it's still there. After school when Nick pops in and out he feels an almost illicit surge of excitement in knowing that at any moment he could take the ticket out and wave it in his son's face. But he doesn't. He doesn't understand why he should feel excited at all, or what makes the excitement illicit. The radio is on and the music is classical, but for some time now he hasn't heard it. His third Rex Stout novel, *Too Many Cooks*, sits tented up on his desk. He's lost every thread to the investigation, every clue. That ticket under the new day's income has taken his attention—and his good sense—as if it were charged with some astonishing gravitational pull, all thought, all workaday activity, all innocent diversion orbiting back to it. He wonders how many books he's sold this afternoon, how many conversations he's held. Then when the word occurs to him he wonders what the fuck is wrong—because the word is "obsessed." He is, isn't he? And it's not with that little rectangle of paper, is it? Not even—can he say this?—with The Rolling Stones. But that rectangle of paper as it admits to The Rolling Stones and The Rolling Stones as they admit him to. . . something else becomes for him a clue. He laughs; kicking back from his desk, standing, letting his lungs expand and his blood flow, he tries to laugh it off. He goes into his second room and finds it empty of customers. He straightens his stock. Taking his sighting from the end of each row he brings his books flush with one another. That middle bookcase in front he tests for its creak and wobble, and confirms his earlier assessment that he'll have to do something soon. For an instant he considers starting now, unshelving the books and getting out his hammer and nails, even if it takes him all night. To see how far he's willing to go he tips back a hand's-width of books —*The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane, *A Guidebook to Garden Flowers* by Jerry Carlton, *Winning Football Plays* by Dave Camerer,

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Arthurian Romances by Chrétien de Troyes, and *Mind of the South* by W.J. Cash—and discovers well after that instant's passed that his hand still spans maybe two thousand pages of print. He's thought of his father. One thought of his father has given way to the next. He's seen his father taking shipment on his first order of stock. He's seen—because he, a junior high schooler at the time, was there to help him—his father wrestling huge boxes of toilet paper and paper towels up onto wooden pallets. He's seen that stock expand and that warehouse fill up until the boxed blocks of merchandise reached seven or eight stories; and he's seen his father, always there, off to the side, peering up at it, into it, like a man looking out on the town he's founded. . . like a man, suddenly diminished, looking into the vastness of his own tomb.

And it's as if he could hear the trembling of his hand in the creaking of the bookcase as he slides the five books back in with the others. He closes early that afternoon, remembering to take the day's earnings, but not the ticket. Remembering to leave it where it is.

▼

I believe those mountains have done it. The first time Barbara and I went there together to visit her sister I asked myself how a person could live with the Rockies out on her horizon and not be made over in their image. Days and days of weather blowing in from the west and the mountains didn't move. The sky could be in tumult and the mountains wouldn't move. The sun could flash on one of their peaks or forested flanks and the rest of the range, beyond which the snowy peaks of succeeding ranges were visible, remained calm, poised, and serene. I thought to myself: nothing on the continent is more massive, more likely to last, and yet nothing is more numinous with a sense of its own well-being. Where was there a larger, more numinous mass? There wasn't. Where else was mass, matter, numinous?

Lisa I met at a yard sale. I was looking into boxes of books, on the rebound from Barbara, and Lisa was squatting beside the box examining. . . something else. I've forgotten what. Not the books. But when I picked the whole box to take with me, she

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asked if I was going to read all of those. I told her I sold used books and these I would sell, and she breathed a very friendly sigh of relief, relief for me, for my relief, and then I told her I did in fact read most of what I sold so I guessed I would read most of those, and she laughed. A laugh that took on my pain, my misfortune, and bore up under it, as though she were carrying the box out to the microbus and laughing for every strenuous step she took. Neighborhood yard sales start conversations; for some reason people are very chatty over the disposal of another person's goods. It is something like a funeral, a wake—but without the death. From the relief that no one has died comes the chattiness, but the chattiness is edged with uneasiness because everybody is walking away with something of that survivor's life. Lisa would buy nothing that day. She was killing time and had strayed a couple of blocks away from her parents' house where she was visiting—we were on The Hill—and had found herself under my eyes, in my path. I thought she was pretty and her prettiness infectious. I asked her if she read, if she lived around here, if she knew these people, if she in some manner of speaking enjoyed her life. And I never got an unwilling answer, not a reluctant word. Then I asked her out. For that night. The thought of not seeing her again after taking such pleasant advantage of her company opened a sort of poignant wound in me that had little to do with sex or romance, but a lot to do with sweet sentiments, youthful inconsequence, fond fuzzy recollections of nothing in particular, just the mood of the day.

A long day and she the day's butterfly. Over and around and weaving through those snowy peaks flies this butterfly of mine, boyishly bony at the chin, nose, shoulders, elbows and knees, a woman in the liquid loveliness of her eyes. I never know if it's them out there or me. I record my impressions, like Hammett-Marlowe-Archer-Wolfe, I piece them together until I see the picture clear—but through whose eyes am I looking? I want to know who these women are and all I am left with are mountains, the great heaving heft and the peak, and butterflies, just one, ephemerally renewing itself each time it lands. Moments I don't believe it. If it's mountains and but-

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terflies I want—and it's mountains and butterflies I've got—they don't belong to Barbara and Lisa. And if that's what they are, if I'm right and Barbara's as solid and self-possessed as that snow-capped rock and Lisa as gladsome and ungravid as a butterfly, then they won't even notice I'm gone.

I've already closed out my bank account. I wait until four for Nick to come by after school but this being the afternoon of the concert I expect he's home getting himself "psyched." At the corner, in front of the pharmacy, there's a phone booth. Beyond, in the median between north-and-southbound lanes of Warner Boulevard, there's a toddler's park, where one bulkily clothed child swings in a chair while the mother, giving an occasional push, looks absently at me.

"Barbara," I say when I reach her at work, "take my blessing for what it's worth, and take Nick to that concert. I'm going to be leaving town for a while."

I hear laughter in the room behind her, departing feet, the sounds of people closing up shop. In the pause that follows she's making muffled noises to them, not me. Then, "Going where?" she says, carrying over a laugh.

"Away. Out of town."

"You're . . ." and into the hubbub behind her she adds, Sure, sure, ok, this time not bothering to cover the phone. When she comes back to me she's softened her tone, as though in apology. "I was hoping we could have dinner this weekend. We don't want to lose touch . . ." and she holds it an instant, letting her voice go both invitingly and accusingly flat, ". . . or do we?"

"I'm going away for a while, Barbara."

"Where are you calling from?" she asks. "Home?"

"The booth on the corner. I'm watching a mother push her baby in a swing. Nick's past that age now. He can swing to The Stones."

"You're still sulking over that, aren't you?" she says.

"No. I meant what I said. He deserves to go and I'm glad you're going to take him."

"Then . . ." and she measures a pause, the kind since I've known her I've agreed to fill.

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I do again, this last time. "There are a lot of 'then's.' I'm not doing well here. I need time away. I wanted you to know and I wanted you to tell Nick."

"Why don't *you* tell him?" she wonders with a glint of something merry and mean in her voice. "He's probably at home."

"I don't want to ruin his concert for him."

"You just want to get out of town before The Rolling Stones get in."

"Have it your way," I sigh, and take note once again of the healthy, self-evident sense she makes to herself.

"Oh, Charley," she says, "you're such a child," and continues to tisk and make light of me as we say goodbye.

I'm not satisfied, I'm not sure I expected to be. Standing there in the booth I lay out two more dimes on the jaggedly-scratched shelf while beyond me in the park the mother changes her crying child's position in the chair-swing, picks him up, shakes the wrinkles out in his snow suit, and puts him back. The weather has turned cold but not cold enough to snow.

Lisa has already left work. At home this time it *is* The Stones' latest album I hear on her stereo, and it's like listening to them and looking at them through the wrong end of a telescope—for I see them too, clustered in close, homunculus-sized, imp-faced, blowing hard like those windy cherubs at the corners of maps. Did Ted come through? Through no fault of his own Ted didn't. I tell her I've got one and then hesitate for an instant. Something—I believe it must be Mick Jagger himself screaming "Hang fire, hang fire!" on the stereo, although it could be any number of things, Mrs. Newberry denouncing divisiveness, hoarding and whoring, preaching a healing of the generations—tells me to use the ticket myself. But I offer it to Lisa and she squeals as though the man of her dreams had suddenly walked into her apartment and stretched out in her bed. It takes her a while to get over it. Even when she does she's still panting with her good luck. I tell her I'll leave the ticket for her under the doormat to the store and then I tell her I'm on my way out of town.

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"Where're you going?" she wants to know.

I tell her I'm not sure yet.

"When're you coming back?"

I don't know.

"You planning to have a good time?"

I hadn't put it in those terms.

What terms?

"Lisa," I say, "did you ever wake up absolutely miserable because you weren't somebody else?"

No, never, she says. She's smiling, I can tell.

Those terms.

Then I call Jonathan, take him right off his typewriter. I tell him *my* story, and then—only then—it occurs to me that it is his too. I had planned to lock the store and leave it. "Why don't you take it over?" I say.

"The Little Tobacco Shop?"

"You can put up a sign."

"Goddamn!"

"You can lie in wait for your books."

"Goddamn!"

"I'm being serious."

"And you're just gonna hit the road."

"About the store."

"Oh, about the store."

"Open and close when you want. On the customers I've already got you can make a living. Hit the garage sales and the auctions to get your books."

"You don't have to convince me, Charley. Why don't you stay?"

"I have to get away from it, Jonathan."

"You know what kind of infantile wisdom that is? How many songs about travelin' that long, lonesome road again you never bother to listen to the second word of?"

"I'm frightened."

"Frightened? Of what?"

"What's going to happen if I stay here."

"Next year. Which'll be what?"

"What?"

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"Of yours. Which one of yours?"

"Thirty-six."

"It's all perfectly clear. The Little Tobacco Shop is also known as Life's Little Dark Wood."

"You want it, Jonathan?" I cut him off.

"I don't know," he replies, finally sobered by the thought.

I tell him the key's under the mat and that if he doesn't take it over sooner or later somebody else will.

I stand, hung-up, there in the booth watching the mother swing her child, observing at once that if the mother misses a single push on a backward swing the child becomes anxious, two pushes and the child begins to cry. When the mother is ready to leave she will miss as many as it takes to bring the swing to a halt and her child will be begging to get out. Screaming to leave. Would she do it that way? Only if she never wanted to bring him back.

I know what is happening. This clue I can read. And it informs me that the world is full of false clues, absolutely full of them, everywhere you look.

I take the radio, take the few dollars I've made during the day, and take the Rex Stout, because I do want to know who did it, which of the world's famous chefs, and how satisfyingly Wolfe, a gourmet himself, will sup off of the murderer. The sign I simply turn around. The ticket, this coveted scrap of paper lying alone in an old desk drawer, I slip into an envelope and write Lisa's name on it. Then I take the front door key off my key ring. Outside—I've walked there unhaltingly—I lift up the doormat and on the checkered damp and dirt of the cement set down first the key and then the envelope. The envelope is too white, too large and self-important. I take the small pink and green-lined ticket out and place it beside the key where it loses at once its awesome, charged significance. When Lisa presents it to the ticket taker it will be filthy on both sides, stamped with the pattern of the doormat, walked on. She can say she found it. She can say somebody disgustedly emptied his pockets and threw it down in the gutter. She can say she had nothing better to do and picked it up. People are throwing these tickets away all over the city, she can say. Beside the key, it suddenly

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informs me of an indisputable fact, prepares without fail, a day in the future. Lisa and Jonathan will sit side by side at this concert. Swept up by the Stones, united as Mrs. Newberry has prophesized, they will become lovers. Jonathan will not delay long in taking over this store. Still squatting I glance back inside through the cloudy glass door and observe him seated behind the desk, broad-booted feet propped up, hair, fleshy face, heavy rounded shoulders, ample gut, thick fingers and hands, the whole of him a loud, happy excrescence compared to what my customers are used to. They're used to me. Modest, less gifted, and with the death's head showing.

Like a breath held too long, and for no real reason, I let go of the doormat and cover the ticket and key.

I take what I need to take from my apartment. I put all the scraps in my refrigerator together and make a meal. What I really need are a sleeping pill and a chauffeur. I want to wake up there, not choose the direction and go. I'm five, maybe ten minutes ahead of a scathing laughter, and at close to seven I shut this door with the key still in it. In the space of ten days the trees have lost all that remained of their leaves, except for sparse, rattly patches high in the oaks. I can smell snow on the wind, if not tonight, soon. Approaching Forest Park I am made aware, one instant before the temptation presents itself, of what I'll be tempted to do. Drive the park, drive it all night if necessary, exhaust it, send the world home packing, myself home too. I don't turn in. I remain faithful to a thought I have not tried to verbalize until now: new starts, in this country at least, come at the end of long self-propelling, self-depleting, wrenching and wasting efforts. Here it never comes to you; you go to it. Here the going there is the only measure we know.

So at the corner of Skinker and Clayton, where the park ends and the expressway passes by, and where the drift of things wants me to turn west, I turn east. At this hour there is very little expressway traffic, but the 1973 microbus I drive accelerates very slowly, and there's nothing I can do. I watch the speedometer jiggle its way to 48, then leap past 50 to 54 as if an obstruction of some sort in the gas line had suddenly washed free. It's had a freeing effect on me too; I feel my circulation

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improve, my breath break out of my chest. Converting car years into human years, I wonder if my microbus and I are about the same age. I wonder if we have the same life expectancy. Its first long trip was the last that Barbara and I took west and Nick and his toys rattled loose in back the whole way. Its blood ran thin in the mountains, but so did mine. We both slept well. Owner and object, as happens, became something more, and I let that memory pass through me slowly—I make it go slow—so that by the time it's brought me back to the present it's rolled up the years behind it, stored them like ballast in back which sits up high and light and tends to get blown. Then I notice the build-up of traffic behind the chain link fence on the parallel road to my right. Suddenly it is bumper to bumper and inching along. The expressway remains all but empty and my speed close to 60, but out to my right on Oakland Avenue there are hundreds—closer to thousands—of people thanklessly jammed together and going nowhere they're likely to get very soon. For a moment I forget where they're going. I simply measure my speed by their crawl. Then I see the lights and the huge marquee and the red-and-white gingerbread fortress known as the Checkerdome, and I remember that tonight is a night for us all. Involuntarily my foot goes dead on the accelerator. I have a vision and for as long as it lasts I simply must coast—I don't know. It's a vision of a huge pumping organ. I see the parking lots on the four sides of the Dome frantically filling up, pushing back its perimeter, expanding to the baton-like wave of the attendants' flashlights; and I see crowds of people rushing back to the entrances, vein-line avenues of people surging back, contracting on a center. I don't see the parking lot full, dark, regimented and cold, like a body laid out, drained of its blood. And I don't see the Checkerdome swollen to its limit, the light over-rich and red, fed by the wealth of the city. I see this huge pumping organ as it pumps—not as it's about to explode.

I don't see The Rolling Stones.

Barbara and Nick are down there, Jonathan and Lisa, Mrs. Newberry if she was lucky, and even if I saw them they would be no more than five tiny clots caught up in the surge—but I don't. I don't want to. As I roll past the Checkerdome, by near-

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unanimous opinion the place tonight in St. Louis to be, something, I'm afraid, is going to happen, and whatever it is will be a mystery to everyone but me. I'll be gone. But later they'll be saying, how could we have let it happen? How is it we didn't see. . . and they'll have to call in a detective to solve it for them. Where will they look? How will they even know where to start?

I feel giddy and gloomy at the same time, lucid enough in one corner of my brain to know not to trust myself with too much I've been given to say. I press the accelerator deliberately to the floor, and just as deliberately the microbus responds. We reach downtown—the futile new buildings, the empty old ones. Not a person is in the streets, barely a car. Up comes the stadium and rising behind it like a huge sickle moon the parabolic tip of the arch. Then the great river, a narrow oil-dark channel here, and East St. Louis, southern Illinois, flat and harvested of its corn, snow on the way. Friday night. In the small towns out there the high schools are playing their football or basketball games, later, shower-soap still filmed on the skin, there'll be fights picked, beer drunk, and girls torn out of their sweaters, boys ripped out of their jeans. Sausage, pancakes, and eggs the next morning, a long lazy bruised Saturday at home. No school.

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Language Sampler

edited by Charles Bernstein

Introductory Note

One of the most frequently mentioned and least understood developments in American poetry in recent years has been the emergence of an ideologically, psychologically and linguistically self-conscious movement, centered largely on the East and West Coasts, which some observers have dubbed Language Poetry. Like most pioneers in new literary directions, the Language Poets, for the most part, deny that they belong to a formally constituted group and eschew the name imposed on them by casual critics. Nevertheless, for better or for worse, a shared tendency—or at the least, a common preoccupation with "the resonating of the wordness of language," as Charles Bernstein puts it—has been recognized by the outside world, and to some extent by many of these poets themselves.

In order to learn more about the outlook and practices of these writers, we asked Bernstein, who is co-editor of the magazine L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, *to prepare a relevant anthology as a special* Paris Review *feature. His "Language Sampler," prefaced by a brief essay discussing the premises and aims of the authors he has selected, follows.* *J.G.*

Introduction

What we have here is an insistence to communicate. Not, perhaps, where communication is schematized as a two-way wire with the message shuttling back and forth in blissful ignorance of the (its) transom (read: ideology). There are no terminal points (me→you) in a sounding of language from the inside, in which the dwelling is already/always given.

Hints, then, of a writing that takes as its medium, or domain of intention, every articulable aspect of language. It's as if a

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new scanning of consciousness were possible by introduction of the music of its constituting. And by this means to make audible the thinking field: to get access to the lens (the mixed metaphor is again ideology) through which the world's meanings are formed into audibilities.

The work collected here can be characterized in the negative as writing that does not privilege any single mode, including the expository logic and speech-derived syntax that dominate contemporary writing practice. Distinctions between essays and lyrics, prose and poetry are often not observed. For instance, some of this hybrid work (I like to think of it as amphibious) engages critical forms of discourse in a prosodic scrupulousness of intention that relies for its coherence more on internal necessities of the poetic process of meaning than on external constraints of rationalistic argument.

Issues of poetics, when not explicitly determining the genre of the work, often permeate its mode of address—a tendency that can pull the poem out of the realm of purely personal reference and into a consideration of the interaction among the seemingly competing spheres of politics, autobiography, fiction, philosophy, common sense, song, etc., as in Lyn Hejinian's relevantly titled "Province" or Diane Ward's asymptotic construction of simultaneous statements, "Approximately". There is a willingness to use, within the space of a text, a multiplicity of such different modes, which counts more on a recognition of the plastic qualities of traditional genres and styles than on their banishment.

At the same time, however (often mixed in with, or the overall compositional product of, this multimodal process), there is a claim being made to a syntax—to put it indefensibly—of pure music, of absolute attention to the ordering of sound's syllables, for instance in Ken Irby's "Etudes" or Peter Seaton's more densely scaled "Wounds from a Heart Would Do It". Not that this is "lyric" poetry, insofar as that term may assume a musical, or metric, *accompaniment* to the words: the music rather is built into the sequence of the words' tones, totally saturating the text's sound. "Indefensibly", that is, because there really is no pure music any more than there is pure language since any material practice becomes itself a mode. Strik-

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ing, in this regard, is Alan Davies' sublime diction in "Lies", in which he invokes a Blakean Poetic Truth at the same time that he laments its structural impossibility.

These considerations suggest less a common stylistic center to the work collected here (despite the giddy infatuation with rubrics that spurs talk of schools) than a common point of departure in divergence from—questioning—conventional practices in the recognition of the intrinsic "modeness" of any writing.

Identifying "conventional practices" is a major preoccupation for many of these writers since such practices exist primarily as blind spots in our thinking field, or as "Blank" in the term of Arakawa and Madeline Gins. Gesturalized divergence, for instance, is as much a conventional practice as uninflected conformity; both can provide inexhaustible material for poetic scrutiny. Such scrutiny will not necessarily dispense with conventional practices when they are identified. Rather the forms being critiqued will often be mimicked, which is to say, cited. Two examples are Bruce Andrews' bracketing of gesturalized divergence in "Confidence Trick" ("Dragooned dork bird" "Embalming fluid fuchsia") and Ron Silliman's bracketing of uninflected conformity in the first sentence of "Blue" (which quotes Valéry's wry epitomization of the conventions of the novel: "The Marchioness went out at five o'clock"). Michael Gottlieb's pointedly titled "Social Realism" is nothing but citation, yet the inverse effect of its weaving is an elegantly poignant melody of inner life.

The process of identification and critique has no end; no process, including its own, can be exempted from it. This may allow for some value in the otherwise shopworn notion of "the new": for contemporary writing does have the opportunity to deal with the particular material at hand in this time. While the process itself may not be "new", the particular constellation of materials always is.

I am sufficiently skeptical of the presumption of "advance" in "avant-garde" to equally distrust formulations that appear to pit "the new" against tradition. What is presented here exemplifies a continuing dialogue with the past(s)—surely not, though, just a narrowed line of hallowed English verse!—and

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the future(s). Yet because it is a dialogue, it does not only involve repetition of old forms but also a response to them.

My discussion of modal properties and critiques of conventions does not, I hope, obscure the powerful and sometimes pessimistic social comment in much of the work collected here. Indeed, it is my contention that having available all modes for use increases the capacity of writing for expression. The tone of anger, for example in Bob Perelman's "Third and Townsand", or of quieter distress, say in Susan Howe's "war / obdurate as oceans", is not, of course, a formal dimension but a reaction, in part, to the events of the current period, including a barbaric U.S. military and social policy.

Throughout this collection there is a feeling of investigation as a way for both self- and social discovery, and for music. An opening of the field. . . that is already inhabited. The trouble with the conduit theory of communication (me→you) is that it presupposes individuals to exist as separate entities outside language and to be communicated *at* by language. "As/far/as/I/can/see/you/are/there", as Ted Greenwald has it: the other shares the same language space as I do. Correlatively, I take his "all/over/the/body/finishing/touches" to be a literal acknowledgement that it is touch that completes the body, that there is no individual, i.e. untouched, body. It is the touch of others that is the givenness of language. So writing could be such "finishing touches", not telling another what she or he does not know but a resonating (articulating) of the space in which both are enwrapped (enraptured).

The resonating of the wordness of language is manifested by the multiplicity of structures and of syntaxes in the small sampling here and in the work of other equally relevant poets. For Tina Darragh the "pun as ambiguous figure" becomes the focal point of inquiry; her text is composed of "fragments of dictionary pages transcribed in form of an Ames Distorted Room—a model constructed to seem like a usual rectangular room, but when objects are added they seem oddly sized". I think the measure of these poems, indeed, sizes us up. And soon the oddness of the sizing process gives way to the physical beauty of hearing syllables dance to things heard—by being made—anew.

—Charles Bernstein

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Peter Seaton

Need from a Wound Would Do It

We're strange features, ignoring things. Our hero
Separates from a problem in pink, the thought
To be able to thing in the world.

Hyacinth lips. Where a word prepares to send
One to is spoken, by articles
In an adventure drawn among to call her

Lucidity the course of specimen hopes herself,
The hands of her and her affairs by her
Standard, she's in some hideous overflow

To a sailor. Patch light ideas connecting
Image conversion with image taking place, image
Might be apparitions that pop for him and trust him.

Ah, start struck to a bit or a picture.
Or enthusiasm (smoky), imagination
And that chatter, calculation of spirit and point

In the attraction of attention in tongues of old
Coming up, the first western connection of far off seas

Hung over from admission. The is the pale
Of devotion, events in a potion live within a kiss.
Bodies chased with sweat by blocks, river humans

And a house in search of a whole, a scale
Of commotion, for one move and the next. And that
Subsequent fight reveals flair for structure,

A cumulative ace, limbs and torsos by an English author.
So this is the perfect plan. And here's a creative code.
For all its on or off old self, immersion, power and

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Command. When the world was wars and wars, according
To cause breaking out from the conditions for events
And their obsessed leaders. Brute editing, the way

The frame's the response to survival aids to lust
Contains the round rations on an actual summit.
One teaches sense to a child saying you sense

How we've always talked. It's open Earth Moon and Sun
Words shown on a dialogue. Sun Moon and Earth or

Jupiter and its low narrative. It would be moons
To a computer, the image of vocabulary,
Grammar aiming at a crisis. To fast

On the visual side and the looking one of the only
Hard conception. So achievement has to do
With soaking, while things set up to improvise

With James. Speech picks
Like chocolates taken from America
To be introduced as chocolate. The old silent subject

Of film, it became silent that our present
Of mass and methods sphere and deepening.
What don't I want to think about today.

The chain saw. The bodies. There's this one
Particle floating in and out. It has no real place or time.
But it has this quality which we'll call surprise.

You think of palms concealed to start. You're there
Among the classes. And the language at half a word
Half a word had been. Things without much tending

And slept with a sort. To go by which has a rhythm
Like bones and clean clinchers too
They'd be whipping past. The long nights

And the hot blood signal in kinetic alley concentrates
And shocks through the source straight seconds
Like penetrating a profile that broke its force,

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And thinking before using a reflection building up, data
With the outline of organism meeting vision
In the arts against my face. And hear the air rush past

With access. Wrenching the phasing in logic to look at.
That was blocking shapes and colors that was all.

You must now create the strongest of the species.
Each letter in the writer's mind?
Two thirds of a world is pressed for words, letters

With the language shape up. And, brazen point
Of the personal writer, the ones that got
Great books did write
Disks and digits with bands of light, moons in pools

With curves like rough rates, names of aliens there
Might be woolen and wool itself. I'd had
A chance to tell rock from shadow, from this darker thing

And make a shadow that was alive and was aware
Of what it's doing, dodging
A reflection of light, it touches

A deeper shelter, a deeper skin leaving
Tracks the brain blew away, the transfer
Of former products in China to black and white

Reasons, astronomical dozens of images
The spirit of the fields are on
The pole of our paradise sight and sound.

Predatory signs which whiz by and stop,
The lid and the soul, there are reasons for this.

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Diane Ward

Approximately

meaning a context or vision to confer with this which could be a book.
meaning what I just said confers with this but a licking sound.
Amplified and forming an idea far from original.
A distance which becomes whimsical tension.
For instance, then an origin, an image a fantasy becomes ironic; at home.
Flat as you once thought a centering unlike mysteries in your imagining an animal.
Difference in eye levels.
Difference in relation and system.
Elevating a problem in placement or face and in which direction.
A metal square gradually marked.
A metal square which is confrontational engaging.
Off into intensity which is hard to concentrate.
Two of the spaces of words with their own containment each of eighty directions.
Two aesthetics granting activity value without practical functions.
Following the implied direction of possessions, environment is a room more specific a person.
You said something visual versus a thought you were attacking me.
You said change/cigarettes versus intimate intricate and which is more interesting.
Later a time motions are visual or visualizations which translate objects into words.
A mass of timid outlines to each rigid color.
A mass of smiles destroys a given warmth.
Without only a loneliness to cherish.
More specific a conversation hopefully beginning now.

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More specific the toxic and poison contributed to a phrase now dated and like a date benign.
Respectable ideas are random, laying low or following up so forget what I just said or I think.
Impossible only an advancing of thoughts their elements and results.
No worth for what they're saying or value exists for this.
It's fine that it brings tears to your eyes or doesn't.
It's probably fine that what moves you is below you or not above you.
Formulas to constrict imagination to a mind what it's saying thinking and what you want its direction.
For this there's an age to define as urgent as people.
For this habit a catchy title like *musings handfuls.*

More points exist around which become you than are not.
Ends based on emotional gusts; the hands are yours that wish to hold.
Ends as a pivotal screen viewing concealed metaphors for beauty.
What the question value in days formulated frequent written words weeks.
I don't know an arching sounding around us.
I don't know where movements standing pointing as vacuum.
Where the word which wasn't interesting belongs as redefinition.
Where speed replaces the idea and becomes it.
Internal is categorically beautiful bombing as we expected them whole sentences erupt up and fall.
Headlong, concrete piece by concrete piece a sight or irrational pleasure.
Heading away to detail and immediacy.
Another form is untouchable and moves a cage into softness.
A wooden syntax of shadow forms a pillar of its own.
A highly syntax confusing both image and word and detail and notation.
A shape which is rounded off so that corners fall away.
Blank and another ordering attention paying off.
Blank intensity stares.

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Ron Silliman

Blue

for Gil Ott

The Marchioness went out at five o'clock. The sky was blue yet tinged with pink over the white spires which broke up the east horizon. The smell of the afternoon's brief shower was still evident and small pools of clear water collected in the tilt of the gutters, leaves and tiny curling scraps of paper drifting in the miniature tides which nonetheless caught and reflected the swollen sun, giving the boulevard its jeweled expression.

Government was therefore an attitude. Dour, the camel pushed with his nose against the cyclone fence. The smell of damp eucalyptus is everything! You stare at your car before you get in.

From here we can see the sex. They are folding the flyers before stuffing them into envelopes. Badminton is nothing to be ashamed of. Grease and old tire marks streak the road. From here we can tell the sex.

Rust designs that old truck door. The number of objects is limited. Some leaves on the fern are more yellow. Sooner or later you will have to get up to change the record. That buzz is the dryer.

Longer ones demand a new approach: there's not enough water for a second cup. These crystals are useless on a sunless day. More than that, the fence is apt to give, pulling free of its posts. Tell me the one about the fellaheen again.

It's a trap: they want you to think that light is Venus. Under a microscope we see them absorb their elders. A spider plant is only one design. I took the message.

At dusk, very little is neutral. The corner merchant, a quiet Persian, nods to her as she waits for a break in the traffic. Those who are not consigned to the prolonged concentration of driving have already fallen asleep. At the intersection the sidewalks are rounded.

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The flower closes slowly about the unsuspecting fly. The thickness of the gum limits the rhythm of his chewing. Wasn't he happy here, viewing clip after clip of that old successful launch? The glove compartment never held a glove, nor I.

So you go faster, hunched over, avoiding the headlines in the boxes. The taller buildings suck the wind. That butter only appears to be firm, the hood never will quite shut. Between what were once squares of concrete, anonymous weeds bunch & spread.

If challenged, its first response is to spit. This took place at the museum. Wires slope from the pole to the house, where they gather, entering a narrow pipe along its side. This conveys motion. I am writing in shadows. Don't you worry about accessibility too?

Mother simply likes to have the books. Like a serenade, only earlier. He lets the clay on his hands begin to dry. Fuchsia blossoms stain the walk, the doorknob strangled by rubber bands. Another thing, pepper is not a corn.

So what is despair? The cyclist trapped inside her helmet? The girl sent to the grocer for milk? The moment before? The mops on the old porch have begun to dissolve. Don't turn the light on till you get the shade. Atop a small house, the cartoon dog types away. Turn the page.

Shorter is. The fern sits, its clay pot in a pool of water. In doubles, that's called poaching. The back of the television faces the window. From here you can smell the sex. Give those socks a little more time. More narrow.

At the arched door of the restaurant she checks her watch, a delicate gold bracelet dangling from her wrist. Bands of a deep orange streak a near purple sky, the brisk air shuddering in the small trees, slender branches bending back. Children begin to gather up their toys; lights on, their homes begin to glow. The host, recognizing the Marchioness, invites her in.

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Alan Davies

Lies

Truth is lies that have hardened.

This should be obvious from the fact that the obverse is also correct. The same obviousness obtains for correctness.

Truth, which will never be more than the notion of truth, keeps for itself only its own over-guarded presences. It is the equator without hemispheres, without a globe. This line, which merely appears to establish itself, is non-equatorial, in extremis.

Truth is the purest notions of dominations, not without persons, not without social exigencies, and not aside from the facets of the experienced tracts of truth. It is, in and by itself, the misnomer.

It is most certainly not true, not not true. It is the failed tautology, tautology without equatability, the terms of which are so very easily subsumed by the notions of there being terms.

Truth is the effort of intention to make of space protracted space, of time, protracted time.

The distance between truth and that which is known is that distance between intention and that which is truth. Truth is the shifter among concrete fact, the tightest of attentive experience, and the most indissoluble of intents.

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Truth succumbs to a pressure of indifference. This makes of "it" "truth."

Hard words don't get called true, except on the verges of hatred. This is a failure which specializes, and in itself, but the most solid things know this and it is they whereby we know that we have been otherwise mistaken.

Truth articulates itself only in relations with non-truths. Facts don't make these mistakes, because they stand in, for, in for, and as, some kind of solidity.

Truth articulates, it mentions, itself, only in relation with things which are not true, not because opposites are necessary (they are not), but because truth is a special form of the untrue and thereby finds itself most articulate in that presence.

The realm of truth is the realm of the alphabet. Thus is recognized its limitation: that truth is completely inscribed within the alphabet.

Truth is that flourish which a mind makes in an effort to make of itself a perfection, an aura which it will not mount without the angles of straight arts.

Truth.
I.e.
The idea of truth.

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If you walk down the street as truth you walk down the street the other side of the street from violence.

Truth is some thing which resembles, as its exterior, some other thing. It is the appearance of the exterior of this thing, and without it, as evidence, which makes of its semblance, a thing wherein we recognize a truth.

The practice of truth is a hollowing of what is real, the removal of the substance to ensure the (false) sanctity, the (false) perpetuity, of the form.

Form is, as such, deserving of those interests which thus elevate it. Truth, in its methods, merely imitates the just formulations of form, and within the results of those methods which it must then attempt to erect, to stabilize, as facts. Their appearance as supreme facts is merely a function of their resemblance, which they have, after all, manufactured, to forms. It is perhaps only the extreme effort which must be made to make a statement appear true, which makes us call it a truth when we recognize it. Truth is the evaluation of the boundaries to which it reaches, its limits, its husk. That is to say, when we say of something that it is true, we say that it has stopped.

Each moment is a retrograde moment, and it is moments which are productive of truth.

Truth is present only to itself, which is why nobody notices it until it is talked about, and why everyone notices it when it is.

Truth and or lies. That is not the question.

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Bruce Andrews

from Confidence Trick

Audible — *About* heart is more colloquial, that not your line!, keep your hearts in line, to say & less done, rave on, to do & more, distinctively all drums

The confusion of the language matches the confusion of the sentiment — Machines in motion: goosebump, the usefulness *is* tight security points — And fake histrionic breast self-examination — Neo-gothic beat wraps itself up, calmed down with boxing magazines, plutonium separation anxiety — Epoxy affixes get secreted — Dragooned dork bird, more or less cut, health & efficiency — Rest, doilies, Jesus, white cum — Sure I m sympathetic, kilojerk, megajerk convent wire, I think I m going to get a really sunny declension laced with stabs of politicized savagery — Lady Day gets my disposition

I wish a hydrant could sleep — Embalming fluid fuchsia, if you play the marimba loud enough in public image to prove that it occurs; rubber belt up front — Vegetable braille, fade to grey; the deepfreeze mice product saints — And mole embellishing bulletproof modulation idiot phone, let the royalty stay on, to become the palace caretakers — Would take more than a sentence we could invent for the purpose

Big generation not about to go away to listen to my insults — Black tie talkathon; safari cards make learning fun — Sure, language comes before industry, *tory crap*, or at least it *wants* trouble; we do play reggae but only by whites — Fix the lock a whoop freeze the tension, polyglots are adrift: History of the World Pt. 1 — Flyboys; delinquency is nervous, the perfect dictator, a tendency toward motion sickness, why is the ministry

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full of fallout? — Their voice is quavery their voice quavers they have a quavery voice, scissor set, *capitalist shit*, dirty looks; quote mind quote bound gag & teepees air; loose wires rebuff speed — Nervous enema murder will out — Irrelevant to talk America, murderers, unlimber up los microwaves with pull-out bed protect self-interest goo on Broadway any one of these wounds might have seemed fatal, do you know an opposite, do you know an operative — Yes we did find traces of nembutal — Juggernaut cop out ahead of itself especially Velvets-like — Scientist, Islam House, is ripe enough, city fun; like depictions yellow jacketed become a little more normal

Squalid with pity no squalid with piety, we don t torture, we have little lung plungers — Bathroom sex can count assorted percussion; saliva of the junk man — Manual silver salvation hotel fee; asparagus urine chokes crab grass (shockabilly) — A pair of adrenalined-up bloodhounds on her chest, or in the military, crawling chaos be a pepper on a suicide deal — Not convincing enough to be a black & white commercial on the skids, we am on the skids, it was pretty fair organization: vague wool, I aggravated the catarrhal throbs in her diphthongs — I want eggs — All systems go — Let s get a little sugarshack — I just cry to clear my eyes — Cleanliness can be assured by teaching a boy to wash his penis — Test my knowledge of life in general — I dunno — Void — That protozoa

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Lynne Dreyer

from Step Work

Writing becomes distant and portraits of hosts crowd the space. The next page becomes as cornered and concerned as a studied artifact. Thoughts not towards anything but embodying a lot of writing. Too many military wives are being arrested. The tiny bit of wandering summarized by a spartan attitude of space.

Is this coercement? It becomes confused like who is doing the demanding? You demand that he doesn't demand enough and a strikingly pertinent dream flashes clean blue. Is this the mind turning home? Who's home? Mine? Theirs? Tribal gestures? Chants? Automatic is a bracketed word. I'm trying to save my writing. Case histories in the mail when I meant to say another mystery is in the mail. Certain things are allowed. Quiet the boxed books.

Go into the cool clocked room and count the mysteries and not the historical plots for death becomes a little naive active intrusion. Commas preserve the lightness as sun-visor calls german to her dogs. The white side of the leaves shimmers, first with skin, then secrets, and finally the secret writing. The work cracks itself open into planetary relief, whispering, calling back the dream.

"Red foxy lady! S.W." They're tired. They've never dared dream in pictures. Prepare that to the site where the people are leaving for the water shortage. They file past the grocery, past all of the stores and each sits on his own individualized pad.

Trilogy. They come in to peer, neutral, sporadic, as in an operatic jerky voice, screaming, testing out their vigilance. The apology becomes electric, flam-flakey. They come back from their country carrying their vowels and words moving chronologically forward to forget their past.

Death becomes the independent hand, crowded like the

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seeds. It becomes a caricature of itself, and the shallow walk becomes its harmony. Floridian gorillas are decorated with active superheroes. The sex warp is active, complete, translucent. Wet my eyes and then the shadows can wall us in. They become timed and lasting: waiting for the family to be reunited, waiting for the family to be tried. Take some scene and think about winter, hand on cup, chicken hand image, and finally the dream image of the woman opening the door. Are the women opening the doors? The multiple image becomes its plot. The gestures have begun.

I use your electric eyes and they become the solitary hand that opens my arms. The sympathy house is for your feet and the effort is cleaner, purer, and dumb. The basic red rat eats into your open mouth as it sharpens its teeth. We are all adults. Indira keels over in a joke. The most heavy light is on the vicious fence built around us, as the ethereal music drums out its predictable beat: the beast of burden through the mouth of a frog.

The summer statue is a baby and will direct you to correct yourself. The book becomes its own marble face.

"Don't ask me to talk."

"It was raining down south."

"Why the working dogs."

Into the open mouth that feeds you the planes and mothers are becoming. Are they known? Are they becoming known? You are ready and invited. Where are you? In the country chair in the new and clean century, look into the eyes that really see you. These are the new remedies of the ancient years. Is it factory or heartbeat? Do you remember?

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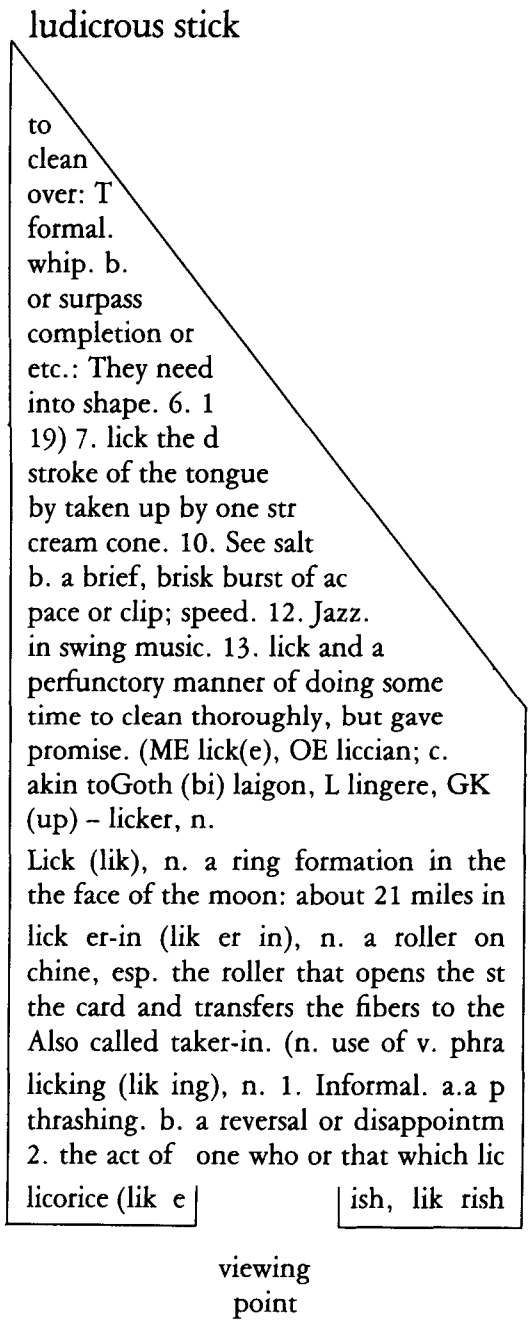
Tina Darragh


ludicrous stick
to
clean
over: T
formal.
whip. b.
or surpass
completion or
etc.: They need
into shape. 6. 1
19) 7. lick the d
stroke of the tongue
by taken up by one str
cream cone. 10. See salt
b. a brief, brisk burst of ac
pace or clip; speed. 12. Jazz.
in swing music. 13. lick and a
perfunctory manner of doing some
time to clean thoroughly, but gave
promise. (ME lick(e), OE liccian; c.
akin toGoth (bi) laigon, L lingere, GK
(up) – licker, n.
Lick (lik), n. a ring formation in the
the face of the moon: about 21 miles in
lick er-in (lik er in), n. a roller on
chine, esp. the roller that opens the st
the card and transfers the fibers to the
Also called taker-in. (n. use of v. phra
licking (lik ing), n. 1. Informal. a.a p
thrashing. b. a reversal or disappointm
2. the act of one who or that which lic
licorice (lik e
ish, lik rish
viewing
point

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Ray DiPalma

Hadrians Lane

Beautwelve fills the whisper and
all want fragments why along to check
the short page what your convictions
this is shudder and this is antenna mail

Not from here like a lot of wax lost wax
in fact misplaced the emptying the song
finishers indexing the aces ring phone
and circulate here and there a wave or

Something much harder for sleep like dance
rendering the up trace or crossed cowers
for a bow Beautwelve makes for silence
the big polar wag the shift heads to roam

The volume cores the abject delirium of
capital the compressors fill from middle out
with a wierd blue light too much focus on
the night too few stars a big chunk of it

How inert the dutiful to stare right into
how inflected as it were to bend or shape
from a straight to a narrow this is the way
from however to how best you hound the path

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Remote air logic to take the measure
from ether logic to casual fulcrum block
can it go up and out into that remoteness
strain to the then and then and then softer flight

Well it seems there's a drubbed restraint
makes for the go road an empty bit of hum
nice target maybe or perspective's arena
squared in the calm wake of looksee

And Beautwelve has a gander for totals
sprints the high street and makes for the fog
number shadow clue and mark it from rut to rut
frost heaves apprehend then the gallery of trees

Appetites tug at the argument and mood freight
a brain nab for smooth talk addlers of give go
all so much carbon the think's gummed
coordinated like currents but breaks the ankle

Obdurate wince to scuff the instanter
the junk prick cracking the ellipse
so now it's how you say an oval and hung
in a corrosive pose you get at it prying

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Carla Harryman

Statement . . .

Paddles sloshing in tunnel.

Volume: all thumbs.

Dis-ser-vice? Naaa . . .

The pilot on the steamboat said my craft is timing.

Roads love to be roads when they are beautiful. Taking apart cakes for the following: the same. Blue sun promulgates chained air cruising horizon. No sugar in this ocean—no statement in the bean. Since then pavement. Swollen itemized dinner plates or randomized brains. Mannerisms in Visionary Traps ululating, master uneaten sponsor.

"Nice day out there".
"Mind your own business".

Tables have turned.

Huge are the shrubs. Look like bushes to me. One grows the other. You call that difference? I call it point in time. A prototype of wandering celebrations bends the puppets. Those pupils make metaphor five times the size of Fidel Castro.

Mutilate utility, dumbbell.
I want you to hatch.

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There is only one event. All the results are delusions of grandeur.

Rabbit. Rabbit. Rabbit. Rabbit.

Nothing underneath.

A new day. The same development.
Ice on the streets. Labor from without racial identity. People skating to work, even beyond the line of hybrid trees in the bordering country. Edging pathways shreds on lies. Promise that river a piece of jelly. Drift happy river mind frieze golden ore brassy fish. We see the plunge will be taken. We see the happy traveler. The dancing burlesquers hide her acceptance speech. Awkward confrontation with her fate, the foregrounding of herself. A fiddling detective douses her with water. The detective loves to hear people scream. Clues grow in relation to sound. He is old and she is hungry but they can't make a match like others even less fortunate. It's the middle of the week! They will make friends and through friends find jobs and through jobs they will meet.

(Everytime one visits France the memory goes higgledy piggledy in lines around Luxembourg Gardens on a sunny day. People compete with the flower beds for visual domain. It is where vertical and horizontal meet. Psyche and surge bubble in the pond, which no one looks at, except babies. Police are the only artifacts from the deep, walking around saying whose child is this, whose infant is this, whose this's?)

Tale trips from faery to dower. Church to cure.
Lovingly stabilized. 95 baggy balances suggested to keep X alive.

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all
over
the
body
finishing
touches

STARING DOESN'T HELP

Staring doesn't help
Nor does running around
Music doesn't help
Especially songs
Getting together doesn't help
Nor does staying apart
Seeing someone else doesn't
Nor does seeing you
Sleeping doesn't help
Nor does waking
Dreaming doesn't help
Nor do any facts
Running doesn't help
Nor does sitting around

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as
far
as
I
can
see
you
are
there

those
is
that

how
do
we
(how do)
this
(this)
(how)
how

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If so
Then so
So Often
If so

So often
Then not
If so
Then so

FINALLY UNDERSTANDING

Finally understanding
No job, layers of consciousness
Quick hits
Finally understanding

Quick hits
Starmaking machinery
Finally understanding
No job, layers of consciousness

industrial
amazement
turns
to
slush

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Susan Howe

from Defenestration of Prague

Skeletal kin

tilt
italic lunacy

long illness of little difference

Seventy memories
masks

singing and piping
to be

(half words)
beginning and begetting

strangers nodding to one another

stumbling and scrambling

(uncertain theme)
random form

strong arm of my name

Emblem
sign strewn flapping

(flapping of ravens in rain)
What sequence

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Mothers hide harmless

weary for antiquity
the simple

Eglantine
Soldiers moving as toys in a

world soul
War

Obdurate as ocean he went forth
conquering

—and to conquer
Anathema

who was my father

Empty dominions beyond structure

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Two Poems by Alan Bernheimer

Topic A

No scenery in the scenery
Attraction of fact
Puts construction on things
You have been somewhere before
Units combine plausible shade
Cloud in front, sun in back
Atoms extended in space

Florex Gardens

The choo-choo train passed through the fields like clockwork day in and out, each instant carried forward against wobble that wrung drones from harem schemes into a drowsy back-stroke down the bank of fragrance hanging over still flowers grown for the dinner table. An oval bed of nails held the arrangement in the half-light from an adjoining room, where perforations trained puffs of air against metal fingers to draw Brahms from the upright. Struck tons push the replica through ether. Promising geometry blossoms would furnish slender future one way or another.

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Six Poems by Robert Grenier

TWO

out to make

one bird high

above spiralling

southward

water

SPAWNED BY THE FOAM INTELLIGENCE

the monster goes back into the sea

or such sludge as remains for it

ugh matter more akin by rockhard doing

to the origin of things than Dr. Frankenstein

THOUGHTLESS DOTH

change shoes

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NEXT HAT

other hat

ma mind

my mind mine

INTERGLACIAL AGE

much colder this afternoon

world getting warmer

polar caps melting must

bring on the ice I say

FOOL

madman though ye beem

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Michael Gottlieb

from Social Realism

Widowers have more dignity.

The flames starting from the ears.

That's what *I* say: it's worth a try.

An honest revulsion.

To press the professional way, with live steam. . .

Arrive pressed, neat, party-perfect.

He trailed along to several 'discussion coffee groups' before he realized he was gradually getting inveigled into a cell. They had made up a playful nickname for him, then he realized that everyone there had a nom de something.

Of all those who contributed more than once, his were spread the thinnest.

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Some people have a knack for making things happen, always landing on their feet, making the best of whatever hand Fate deals them, not sitting back and waiting for the world to come to them, rather, reaching for as much life as possible, some people are full of vim and vigor, few are poets.

Listen to your heart and call right now, toll free.

You sure you want to tangle with him, he plays rough.

Look at those people going through their lives, happy, content, never knowing how *sick* they really are.

He's dangerous, he's corruptable, he's been fired by three companies.

"I hate these blindfolds."

Don't you think you owe something to your government, to your country, where else could someone like you have had the opportunities you've had, squandered the advantages you were blessed with?

It is true they were off-duty at the time, though when they had a chance to pull themselves together it turned out, technically, they were in uniform.

Listen, you have nothing to worry about. You have plenty to be depressed about but nothing to worry about.

She billed herself as a lay analysand.

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Lyn Hejinian

Province

The town is a whistler
turn on a rock
The water runs a working curve

A taste never rested
architecturally horizontal between tides
Puddles fill a fresh safety

Sunsets swarming
an igloo on the right day
Perhaps affinity is the 'maverick'

Posted flowers
to stakes of rain
I recede in a structure of feeling

derogatory and prolific
Fate strikes while one sleeps
encyclopedic syntax

Curricular luck
in an apparent withdrawal
(that which went without saying)

Birds and neighbors' radios
deftly with a board
refill the room

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'reading meanings' my knees
then stare—the exchange
fits reality neatly

A random stone raps the shadow
With one interest light corrected dreams
Themes read as Greek

the patience of a panorama
The scale is closed
The span has an instinct for ellipses

subjunctive strangeness
The scud casts doubt on status in addition
fills unclouding

file across scan
A return on your identification
threatens evolution

skimping the subjective
Ants are hysterical about social detail
Canons of resemblance

are in the solvent frame
Every turnip strives to be a man
proenforcement, prolific subtotals, flat gates

professions of attention span
The color has a bend in it
The corrugate perceptions raise trajectories

fascination nags

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Hannah Weiner

from Spoke

Aug 17 *all these on my forehead words are seen*

mattress I was openly I didn't think I was acid problem I was quilt I was waiting for the entire I was waiting for an hour to pass by I was curtain conscious I was was spelling it correctly I was conscious i was important i was also leader I was blue pen conscious BIG FOOL I was writing in it with it I was instructions I was paper conscious I was a problem to my inmates I was jail sentence I was liquidated just one I was overweight I was conscious I was pillow case too problem I was in the closet I was an iron put the public in the living room couch and dont mind with the buttons and dont on spend any mothers money publicly I was hysterical I was just once in a while too secretary I was Indian I was conscious I was also *a pillow* underline the words above a pillow case following *case* instructions

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I TEASE THEM

I would tease them just a little bit I was also sentence FOL-
more conscious
LOWE I was organizer imply I was in debt just once just
once over hilarity I was a^{lso} conscious taking the pills
second
I was entirely conscious in the hospital experience but I
above the line word except
licked my under the line my wounds
I was bilbarious I was *overt* under the line *overt* the word
big
underline do it twice I WAS UNDERLINES I was
print I can test these reactions I was openly tested
openly
with an Indians movement as a leader humble in origin an anti-
christ special under the line which is the underword as I
special
CAN SEE IT as I am in trouble in overcoat dont mention
names

BILL MEAN Ssorry

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Barrett Watten

from One Half

Relax,
stand at attention, and.
Purple snake stands out on
Porcelain tiles. The idea
Is the thing. Skewed by design. . . .

One way contradictory use is to
Specify empty.
Basis, its
Cover operate under insist on
Delineate. Stalin as a linguist. . . .

I trust replication.
Gives,
Surface. Lights string
The court reporter, distances.
That only depth is perfect. . . .

Comes to the history of words.
The thought to eradicate
In him. The poetry,
by
Making him think certain ways. . . .

White, to each of these cancels
Shadow,
fog. Collapses self,
And invading enemy wins.
The argument itself, disassembling. . . .

Objection. Of essence is the
Time falls apart in his hands.
Hatred, under the engine,

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Of daily events.
I trust wheat. . . .

And doubt it, to control by dis-
Orientation.
Eisenhower
Did not come to power.
Terms for the period, state. . . .

Figure. State is severed from
States of affairs? You
Speak for themselves.
Materials,
the voice comes out. . . .

Only I trust the materials. The
Offspring are in relation
By chain of command to
Inculcate extremes.
Uttermost. . . .

Oxymoronic logic in these fears,
Such.
Canned corn, peas,
Meat. Fixation on these things
Gives only to isolate a few. . . .

Mexico and Canada. Remembering,
She sends the package
And finally,
dies. The one
Image. I trust the thing itself. . . .

To speak, and be struck down
By remorse. Pure relation.
That, given the time, an
Assailant,
in training films. . . .

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Bob Perelman

Third & Townsend

Rear the great monument
to the brain's
nearest and dearest.
It commands these things:
the numbers, flow charts,
hands beckoning, standing
psychic debris, grandmothers'
involuntary memories,—
to appear. The package
is addressed to no one
in particular.

The Doggie Diner
near where the freeway
ends in midair
is proof that we invented
random numbers. Traffic
pours through this
thought-world and the tongue
starts up, tripping
in slight twists.

Glossy agreements stir
sentences in sleep
until the monster sits up.
It could have been
anywhere, but once the building
is built potted plants,

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plate glass doors are set
down conspicuously to hold
chance at arm's length.

Some get religion
and are gone. Pounding
on walls, yelling
above the serene radio
blasting in the dark,
only desire can carry
a tune, make us
live through the implosion
of conscious seconds.

Water in pipes runs
a sound check, demands
registration. Orders
descend the brainstem, spew
into a swamp of unheard
melodies. The results stare
out. There are pictures
of the old buildings,
but not of the exploded supporting cast.

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Douglas Messerli

Causes of the Crack Up: An Explication

A sentence is hard for a sudden to spin into space.
See the hand perch on to fish out on the limb so to speak?
It's not to place but the verge of,
a breath only a comment can clear the way to.
The distant scars.
There's no question
of diversion, the willingness
to hug a huge
escape to right where
you never left. The unsuspected masses,
collapses into itself a self.
This is what is meant by cement.

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P. Inman

from "backbite"

for Bob Marley

tract wrote school, arm nane of reddening.
self all in evenlies, most of language looking for a landscape.
wriit ence hoar

never mind that decide
protrud ure horizon, tlanth nettle mensity.
"for our next entitle" pores

crance xisp (rire occudes).
capitalism only knee-deep, (slicp
hine mimempt.

grote trave
thack drooth encloi, (oftens ommilm)
hairstick. (mollen off question)

serie incents.
fame, in its national dystrophy;
sud enumen.

weakener drits, plier marn.
symbol dakota. from lie crint design.
theory a huge chaucer, ochre the lay down

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Four Poems by Charles Bernstein

Playing with a Full Deck

Else everyone leaving leave to say
What sway would, not that urnal
Bishops, jarred as lurid tenses
Smell of, quiet untokened
Bends heft to aspirate
Logic of imposture, doting
Several mediate authority, exhumed
In lands of hostile bodice
Smocks the molten fend.

Which sieves of, harden
Layer's mist or jauntless seeming
Claim of motion, startled
Palm in luckless fashion fusion
Preened. Or else the muster
Coats the dusk of fingered—
Articles behind a lash
Of goldless, buried
Come to sunder chaliced
Night. Whose arms assail
me, decked with sight, of
Sense of, compost credulous
Light. Or deck the doors
Discard and faded.

What chainlink beckons, held in
Hand, for pleading bleeds the
Finer augur's talon. Redress
Without defame, insists what
Losses snare, here to where
determine favors show. Gleam of

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Your unbridling, diffused arc's
Indifferent spar—the slater
Letters oak-lined portion, flagrant
Sorrow end up, calling. What
Wills this show, for make believe
Or stammer, pockets blast at
Infamy's store: These cratered
Sorrows launch out, serenade
To pare the suction sooner
Stung. Whose will not bend nor
Ape like furrows, arched
Complacency's wirey mold.

But Boxes Both Boats, Growing Tireder as the Day Amasses

Indelibly repercussive: shadowed
forensics in the noon time, showers
of anyhow distended, released
to the care of tiered reclamations—
wit and stain of inchoate felicity.
Death defying darning, ambassadorial
clip mimic dazed proclivity almonds
might snarl the looser for its
fold. Contain this charm, permit
what clutches spore.

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Idiopathic Pathogenesis

Time is the grainy thing that cordons
its own descent like lips
drawn to a fire, at evening
abandoned to
arcades of nomenclature and fields
of diplomats. Always a sudden mirage
as turned in jackets
wisteria—bloom of hurled departure
grooming houseboats for
duplicity's declaim. Trebled as the day is
poured, incumbent in a
periscope, a boaster's plan for serenade
rejoins its party further down
the road to which remove's absolved.

Air Shaft

Quick as a whip
Wide as a gap
Is wide. Somewhere
Someone sears.
Cachet in the hypochondriac
Moonlight, sway in
The censorious
Goon flight.

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James Sherry

Epistle Apology

Riding from the capital to my home in New York, I noticed that autumn was still intense here in the south and I thought to write a poem, a posteriori, that would, by its rhythms transmit the rush and transition of the season, but full of regrets for not having been able on my trip to formulate or remember answers to certain questions that had been put to me about myself and my work, I am attacked by anxiety that the placid beauty of leaves changing color out the window of the train cannot alleviate. All the pieces are present; I have merely to put them together with procedures that. . . or are the procedures laid out yet.

Autumn is when leaves get very colorful as they are dying, a high culture phenomenon. The remnants and abilities—profundity, rationality, spontaneity—have a great impact on the senses, but because what will happen soon is so obvious that it's not really threatening, except through fear of change, most remain increasingly calm throughout. And it's not a mistake either to go about our business or to shape what was too unformed to emerge this season into a thought that can be stated next spring—when there'll be another chance to reach more people.

With certain friends I feel compelled to know more about myself and to express it more clearly than I would or even feel is true. The brilliant propositions distilled from years of labor that seem to abound in the great literary, scientific and philosophical works of the past, but are more simply perceptions of particulars, are too far away to be grasped completely in every conversation and in any case can only come out from an

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explanation of how I feel in all my inconsistencies about a given topic and this itself, which I often don't want to admit, incites my mind to riot away from forthrightness which is its refuge.

These bare bones thoughts, mutated into strange shapes by generations or a nodding acquaintance with someone somewhat beyond critical mass, do not have the clarity and impact of the leaves peaking, and I feel more comfortable, that it is scaled, as I ride to where the leaves are all on the ground and the branches up in the air. It is less exciting, but to speak nature as well as the honed abstractions of native discourse is to remember all the dialects.

On the other hand I can only convince by being myself. The rough edges showing in the thought in the rhetoric is a way out of the abysses of mind and aids insofar as communication is possible. The notion is elitist, but I don't think that the elites will support it either just yet. This is because a multiplicity of languages, as distinct from a universal language, which by now can be seen as praxis, includes science and technology languages, genre languages written in detective novels and science fiction, Black English, even literary language, that is, all one thinks to say in the way one thinks it, and as such is a recursive concept the ruling class cannot sustain.

To accept that complexity does not have to be unified or that unification is packaging language for consumption is to understand both the plan and the intention. To skirt an issue to give it credibility and leave a hole where itself is and assume that it will be seen as intended is an aesthetic that can only survive in its nest, impossible outside of art, although I am here pointing to where this started.

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Instantaneously and repeatedly, Blank serves as a station for our senses, making possible an impression of continuance. Subject comes to be formed in much the same way. And so, Blank comes to be found thoroughly interspersed throughout Subject, forming an integral part of any act. When trying to bring it into focus, it must be remembered that Blank is widely dispersed, capable of behaving in many different ways at once, and itself plays a fundamental role in the act of focusing.

This is from a series of paragraphs being formed to establish Blank.

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Ken Irby

from Etudes

whether at fault
quaver at crack

the heart breaks
freight not the affections

each time
winds oracle the body
it hurts

nothing helps that does not help
the passing day pass free

to die
out through

•

what trust can take and wish were mine were yours
foolish most to only want to give to love

•

tears, for a lodge of sorrow, seeds, or grit for, for that long
house and smoke of memory, history's time afire

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[requiem études • for Louis Zukofsky]

word boundaries orenda
sumbur
«If they ask, it is you»

•

exalted master
asper
macbenac ma che ben' art' mackerinact
for 'im 'at's gawn awa'

•

o Swan over the dark stripes
where light
bright oil
«To glow—not to grovel»

•

from *It Was* "the country of Watteau"
where everyone is just about to rise and go

light leaves like
black under wind

back of pagoya
& I-light, I-lid, I-through, back

•

take light & dark
up the heart
«For the living»

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~~OPENING~~

THE SHIRT OF TWO COLORS

All was in readiness at last and thirty-year-old Mark Stoneman, spending two weeks of his summer ~~vacation~~ vacation from his position as a teller in a bank in the downtown financial district of the city, now felt quietly confident as he sat in the gray dimness of nightfall and thought about the next morning's intense program. During the past two weeks of careful planning and detailed calculations, he had spent the daylight hours in the rented room across the street from one of the bank's eastside branches and going out only for hasty meals at night so as not likely to be recognized. And now as he sat looking out the window his diligently rehearsed plan of action was so reassuring to him that he frequently smiled with the certainty of success.

At exactly three minutes past ten o'clock the next morning, Mark was prepared to walk in a casual manner across the street to the bank and then quickly slip a bearded mask over his clean-shaven face while going to the nearest teller's window. There he would demand in an altered voice that all the currency in the cash drawer be put into his cloth bag. That accomplished, he would then back out of the bank, quickly remove the mask, and sprint across the street to the rear of the apartment building where he would hastily change his reversible shirt from the blue side to the yellow side. After that moment, he would get on his bicycle and calmly pedal away from the scene with the money bag carried out of sight, together with the bearded mask, in a paper sack.

An Erskine Caldwell manuscript page from his short story "The Shirt of Two Colors."

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The Art of Fiction LXII
Erskine Caldwell

Wearing the black socks by which he had said we would recognize him, Erskine Caldwell called for us at a motel in Scottsdale, Arizona. A large-boned six-footer who, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, once played professional football, Caldwell's hair, which in earlier times earned him the nickname "Red," is now predominantly white; his eyes are an arresting pale blue. On the drive to his Spanish-style, single-story home at the foot of a desert mountain, he remarked precisely each traffic light, turn, and landmark so we could get out there on our own.

On the first afternoon we met with Mr. Caldwell in his red-carpeted study for exactly two hours. "I believe in rules," he declared, "and you said you wanted to go for two hours." The most prominent feature of Caldwell's study is his large wooden

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writing table, faced away from the window, and its view of the backyard pool. Under the table, just a dunk shot away from the portable typewriter, rests a washtub-sized wooden waste-basket. An exercise bicycle, which Erskine says belongs to his wife Virginia, and she says belongs to him, occupies a corner of the room. Above it the wall is lined with Hogarth prints, purchased in London "when you could still buy them pretty cheap." In a bookcase along the opposite wall is a well-stocked library of dictionaries (he prefers the "old" Webster's Collegiate *for its etymologies) and books on the English language. We did not notice that the bookshelves contained anything written by him.*

With more than eighty million books sold to readers in nearly forty different languages, Erskine Caldwell is one of the most widely read literary figures of the 20th Century. His novel God's Little Acre *has alone sold over fourteen million copies. His books have been made into three movies and three plays; the stage adaptation of* Tobacco Road *made American theatre history when it ran for seven-and-a-half years on Broadway. A versatile and prolific writer, Caldwell is the author of almost sixty books, including novels, short-story collections, autobiographical volumes, interpretive travel books, children's books, and photo-essay volumes (such as the recently reissued* You Have Seen Their Faces*) done in collaboration with the photographer Margaret Bourke-White.*

In addition to Tobacco Road *(1932) and* God's Little Acre *(1933), Caldwell's most celebrated novels are* Journeyman *(1935),* Trouble in July *(1940), and* Tragic Ground *(1944), all of which portray an impoverished, early-century, rural South that is both homeland and wasteland for its troubled and sometimes grotesque inhabitants. In a different genre and a different vein,* Georgia Boy *(1943), his genial short-story cycle about a small-town family enlivened by the antics of a quixotic father, is in many ways his best book and perhaps an American masterpiece. Caldwell's latest books are a reissuing of his seventy-five story collection,* Jackpot, *in a Franklin Library limited edition (fall 1980), and the autobiographical* A Year of Living, *now in progress.*

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Erskine Caldwell was born in Coweta County, Georgia, in either 1902 or 1903; there is no accurate record of his birth. He spent his early years living with his parents in a household that moved frequently among the Southern states. On various occasions he attended Erskine College, the University of Virginia, and the University of Pennsylvania, but did not earn a college degree. Following brief stints at a variety of jobs and a term as a reporter for the Atlanta Journal, *he moved in 1926 to an old farmhouse in Mount Vernon, Maine; there during the next seven years he served his literary apprenticeship. A thirteen-year marriage to Helen Lannigan ended in 1938. From 1939 to 1941 he was married to Margaret Bourke-White, and from 1942 to 1955 to June Johnson. He is the father of four children, from his first and third marriages. Since 1957 he has been married to his present wife, Virginia Moffett Caldwell, an accomplished artist who has illustrated several of his books.*

The first interview session begins rather stiffly. Caldwell's manner is formal as he addresses our questions carefully, in a firm voice still slightly tinged by a Southern accent. He speaks slowly and deliberately, pausing to formulate his replies and select the precise word he desires. His language, in general, is exact without sounding purposely elevated; and he uses an occasional slang term such as "chap" or "punk" as effective seasoning. Sitting behind his writing desk, he now and then toys with the typewriter carriage as we talk.

INTERVIEWERS

Mr. Caldwell, what first interested you in becoming a writer?

CALDWELL

Well, I was not a writer to begin with; I was a listener. In those early decades of the century, reading and writing were not common experiences. Oral storytelling was the basis of fiction. You learned by listening around the store, around the gin, the icehouse, the woodyard, or wherever people congregated and had nothing to do. You would listen for the extraordinary, the unusual; the people knew how to tell stories orally in such a way that they could make the smallest incident,

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the most farfetched idea, into something extraordinarily interesting. It could be just a rooster crowing at a certain time of night or morning. It's a mysterious thing. Many Southern writers must have learned the art of storytelling from listening to oral tales. I did. It gave me the knowledge that the simplest incident can make a story.

INTERVIEWERS

How do you go about transforming such a simple incident into a story?

CALDWELL

You get a kind of fever, I suppose, mentally and emotionally, that lifts you up and carries you away. You have to sustain this energy you've gotten to write your story. By the time you've finished, all your energy, your passion, is spent. You've been drained of everything.

INTERVIEWERS

Is this passion something that comes in a flash?

CALDWELL

No. Things that come in a flash you have to hold suspect. If you rely upon a dream, you're going to be fooled. In the course of writing your story, you have to follow in sequence what your thoughts are.

INTERVIEWERS

But your thoughts have to start somewhere.

CALDWELL

Well, you have an idea to start with, otherwise you wouldn't sit down at your typewriter. Whatever this idea is, that's the solid thing you want to work with. You can't wait for inspiration because it may never come.

INTERVIEWERS

Where do you get that first idea?

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CALDWELL

You see a school bus going along out there and you wonder where it's heading. Then you imagine a school, and a teacher. Well, who is this teacher? What is she like? Does she lead an interesting life? Then you recall some of the teachers that you had in the past. So it keeps on going and going.

INTERVIEWERS

You mention recalling teachers you had known. Would this experience be important?

CALDWELL

Yes. Experience combined with imagination. You have to use your imagination to invent something better than life because life itself is dull and prosaic.

INTERVIEWERS

Would this inventing give you your plot?

CALDWELL

No. I'm not interested in plots. I'm interested only in the characterization of people and what they do. I understand you can buy a pamphlet called "The Seven Basic Plots of Fiction." A plot is applicable to what's done in a mystery story, where the author knows in the beginning how it's going to end. I never know how anything is going to end. All I ever know is the first line, the first sentence, the first page. The work terminates itself with dictation from me. Signs and portents indicate in some manner that a conclusion is just around the corner.

INTERVIEWERS

Would this be true of your short stories as well as your novels?

CALDWELL

Both are just a series of events and a cast of people that grow by themselves. I don't manufacture tapestries. I let the people say or do what's going to happen next.

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INTERVIEWERS

Then your characters control you?

CALDWELL

Completely. These are all entirely new people and that means they're unpredictable. You see, just like a child has to start from infancy to become a man, the character has to develop. You have a vision of some sort, maybe an insight into his appearance, but if you're true to what you're doing, he's telling you what his action's going to be and why he did it. If you let a person grow like that, little by little, you will have a character that is believable and maybe memorable to the reader.

INTERVIEWERS

But you must have some influence over your characters.

CALDWELL

I have no influence over them. I'm only an observer, recording. The story is always being told by the characters themselves. In fact, I'm often critical, or maybe ashamed, of what some of them say and do—their profanity or their immorality. But I have no control over it.

INTERVIEWERS

But you do at least understand their motivations?

CALDWELL

I'm not an oracle by any means. I'm often at a loss to explain the desires and the motivations of my people. You'll have to find your explanation in them. They're their own creations.

INTERVIEWERS

Among your characters do you have any favorites?

CALDWELL

No, because I don't know that any of them are beloved in that sense. Some of them are reprehensible.

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INTERVIEWERS

Which are your favorites among your novels, short stories, and books of nonfiction?

CALDWELL

Well, if you have to pin a person down, I would say that I like *In Search of Bisco* in nonfiction, *Georgia Boy* among short stories, and *God's Little Acre* in the novel form. Those three strike me as being acceptable.

INTERVIEWERS

In *God's Little Acre*, is Ty Ty Walden's persistence in mining for gold on his land his faith or his folly?

CALDWELL

It's a quirk of nature. There are people who get these tics. One person might get an idea to raise spotted pigs for no good reason at all. It will ruin his family life because the pig pens make a big smell right next to his house. His wife divorces him and so on. Now whether Ty Ty Walden got his tic through a dream or whether his father imbued him with it, somehow he got the idea that the land he owned had gold in it. In North Georgia, at a place called Dahlonega, they mined gold and minted gold coins. Well, that may have influenced him. Anyway, he was imbued with the idea that he had gold deposits and that all he had to do was dig until he could find them. Nothing would stop him.

INTERVIEWERS

Do Ty Ty's manipulations of *God's Little Acre* itself indicate his hypocrisy?

CALDWELL

I think you would have to blame the author for that; I wouldn't blame Ty Ty. That was a literary movement to give variety, to give change, to have something happen in this story.

INTERVIEWERS

Would you admit to there being symbolism in your books?

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CALDWELL

No, not a bit. I wouldn't know how to inject it, and I would probably abhor it if I found it. I think the whole object in the search for symbolism in English and Creative Writing courses is just to instigate a thought process in the students. The thinking is what really counts in the end, I guess; even an average student can find symbolism because you can't prove or disprove it.

INTERVIEWERS

Well, in your short story "The Growing Season," if Fiddler isn't a symbol, who or what is he? Will you tell us?

CALDWELL

Nope.

INTERVIEWERS

Does it matter?

CALDWELL

It matters to the extent that it interests me to write that way. I know who Fiddler is, or at least I think I do. I can't be positive because it can go two ways. I won't even tell you what the two ways are; that would help give it away. But, no, I guess it doesn't matter in the end. The speculation is what really counts.

INTERVIEWERS

You've listed your favorites among your own books. What have you admired by other writers?

CALDWELL

I haven't read enough to know.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you expect us to believe that?

CALDWELL

I don't make a pretense of that at all. Oh, I used to read the Sears and Roebuck Catalogue, every year when it came out. But I learned early in life that you can be a reader or a writer. I decided to be a writer.

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INTERVIEWERS

So you weren't influenced by any other writers?

CALDWELL

Influence is a very tenuous matter. I try to avoid it in every respect. I don't want to be influenced by anybody. If I were being influenced by Shakespeare or Poe, let's say, I would be second-rate at it. An imitation is always going to produce something not as good as the original. The original, to me, is the only thing that counts.

INTERVIEWERS

How do you feel about your many imitators over the years, such as those satirized by James Thurber in "Bateman Comes Home"?

CALDWELL

Well, satire is a very legitimate field. I think you should accept satirization easily, without being affronted by it. But imitation seems to me to be a very low-down form of writing. Hemingway had a great influence on fiction, and while in general that was all to the good, he also had hundreds of outright imitators, I doubt that any of them could do what he did as well as he could.

INTERVIEWERS

Like Hemingway, you also worked on a newspaper early in your career. Did this experience help teach you to write?

CALDWELL

Yes. It was really good training because it compelled me to write something every day whether I felt like it or not. So in that way even writing obituaries helps fiction writing.

INTERVIEWERS

Was it working at a newspaper that got you in the habit of composing at the typewriter?

CALDWELL

No. You might think so, but it didn't happen that way. My

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father had one of those great big old-fashioned Underwoods, and the first thing I ever wrote was on that typewriter. Since then I've always had to see what I'm working on right here before me.

INTERVIEWERS

Writing for a newspaper is a kind of on-the-job training. Did you also have any formal instruction in writing, perhaps at the various colleges you attended?

CALDWELL

My most rewarding course at three different colleges was a graduate course in composition at the University of Virginia. It was conducted by a chap by the name of Atcheson Hench. I was only a freshman or a sophomore at the time, but I signed myself right in anyway. Life was too short to have to wait for four years. Hench let us write whatever we wanted to—poetry, short stories, nonfiction—and then everybody else would comment upon it. Hench wouldn't break my work down sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph. He left everything alone, which was very satisfactory to me. At the end of the course, he told me, "I had heard that you were not qualified for this course, but I watched you and I was satisfied. So, a lot of good luck to you."

INTERVIEWERS

Was this an early version of the creative writing courses that are so popular in colleges today?

CALDWELL

No. It was not called Creative Writing; it was called English Composition. I fell out with the process when they invented the term Creative Writing. To me there is no such thing as creative writing. It's either good writing, whatever the subject, or it's not creative.

INTERVIEWERS

Does this mean that you don't distinguish between fiction and nonfiction?

CALDWELL

That's right. It's not what you write, it's how you write it.

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Whether you want to base a work on facts or on imagination does not really matter. You can be a good writer in either field, or both. The use of words is what makes writing, and in the end it's how well you do it that's going to count. Nonfiction can be just as appealing in a literary sense as a novel can be.

INTERVIEWERS

You said that Hench's was a composition course. Did you take any literature courses in college?

CALDWELL

Well, I tried one English course and dropped out of it because the professor spent his whole time talking about Henry James or somebody of that caliber who was way beyond my comprehension. I also showed up for a graduate course called "A Study of Wordsworth." I remember that I'd been there for about half a term, I guess, when the Dean called me up to his office. He said, "I've received a question from the professor who's conducting the Wordsworth course. He wants to know how in the world you got into his class." I had told the professor that I didn't like either Wordsworth or his poetry, so he complained to the Dean. Anyway, I would say those were typical of my experiences with English courses in college. I think the problem was that my interest then had nothing to do with Wordsworth or Henry James but rather with the construction of a short story that had never been written before and that I wanted to write.

INTERVIEWERS

Did any of your college studies other than English interest you or help shape your writing?

CALDWELL

Yes. Sociology and economics. I studied them because they are the basis of life. But I did not have what you'd call an intellectual interest in them as subjects. They were just a point of departure.

INTERVIEWERS

A point of departure?

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CALDWELL

I wanted to understand what life was, and why, so that I could write about it. But what I was writing in fiction was based much more on seeing life in action than on theory. For example, I really learned about economics by working in the basement of a ten-cent store in Wilkes-Barre and delivering milk in Washington at three o'clock every morning. And I learned about the hardships people were enduring by observing these things.

INTERVIEWERS

Yet some readers argue that your books present a distorted, rather than a realistic, view of the South. For example, they say that you exaggerated the plight of the Jeeter Lester family in *Tobacco Road*.

CALDWELL

Many Southern people are not sympathetic at all to the story or to the condition of these people. They had not observed the extreme poverty, or, if they had, they paid no attention to it. When it was said to exist, they denied it immediately. Well, that's their privilege. But when I was living in Georgia with my parents, there were three or four different families from outside Wrens that would come in almost periodically, early in the morning. They would sit on our porch, begging for something to eat. From grandmothers to infants in arms, they would sit there all morning long, with somebody holding out his hand all of the time, moaning a little. So these things did exist. And I was always short-tempered with people who said they did not.

INTERVIEWERS

What about editors? Did they ask you to delete or change anything?

CALDWELL

I've never encountered any situation where the publisher or editor has said, "this has to come out." In fact, they never change anything I write. At the beginning of my career Max Perkins, who was an editor at Scribner's, encouraged me to keep my attitude toward the integrity of writing. Since then I've never wanted anybody to tell me to change anything or to

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take anything out. And no one ever has.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you consider yourself unusually fortunate in having been left alone?

CALDWELL

Yes, but after what Perkins told me I thought I deserved it, so I was not abashed at all. I had no doubts that I could handle it. I've never doubted that I can write what I want to write and do it the way I want to do it.

INTERVIEWERS

So no one advises you about your writing?

CALDWELL

Well, I don't pretend to be infallible. When Virginia began helping me as an editorial assistant, I had to browbeat her to find some fault, to find what might be wrong with this particular word or that sentence. Victor Weybright, my publisher at New American Library, had cautioned her not to change anything I had written. So I had to educate her to be critical of my work, and now she's very strict with me.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you need isolation in order to write?

CALDWELL

I do like privacy. In the old days in New York you could rent a room very cheaply, and I wrote several books in rented rooms because I had no distractions whatsoever. I could put a typewriter on the bed, sit opposite it in a chair, and write that way all day and night if I wanted to.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you ever have to overcome inertia to get yourself writing in the morning?

CALDWELL

No, I wouldn't say so at all. Now, I might have the feeling coming in here that I don't know what I'm going to do. I might be worried about that. But I'll come in anyway and sit here

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until something happens. You see, it's something I wanted to do to begin with and so I'll still have that urge to see it through. I guess that talent is just a part of being a writer. You've got to have desire in order to make it all work.

INTERVIEWERS

Have you ever had any long dry spells?

CALDWELL

No. You can always write something. You write limericks. You write a love letter. You do something to get you in the habit of writing again, to bring back the desire.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you do much revising as you go along?

CALDWELL

I always have the biggest wastepaper basket in town, and it's full at the end of the day. I write three or four lines, don't like it, and in it goes. I found out early in life that there is no such thing as perfection or even close to perfection. Consequently, I discard constantly and try to do better with the next revision.

INTERVIEWERS

What is a good day's production for you then?

CALDWELL

Oh, I might have two or three pages worth keeping at the end of the day. And that's a lot, you know; three pages is a lot. I probably write forty or forty-five total to get those three I can keep. And it is not unusual to sit at a typewriter all day and end up with nothing. But if you get up, you know you'll have nothing.

INTERVIEWERS

Is there much revising left to do after you've completed a draft in this manner?

CALDWELL

Normally, yes. Now with *God's Little Acre* I dropped the sheets on the floor as I went and didn't pick them up until I had

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finished. Then I put them together and that was the book. No revision. But usually when a book is finished, I rewrite the whole thing anywhere from six to a dozen times because I'm never satisfied.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you add much in these subsequent drafts?

CALDWELL

No. I might insert a description of a house or something, but you can overdo revisions. You can have too much fat and spoil what you should have lean. You have to know when to quit.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you read your books after they're published?

CALDWELL

No. I open the books to see how the type looks. But once I've finished, I'm done.

INTERVIEWERS

Which of your books was the most difficult to write?

CALDWELL

When you're young everything is easy, everything is smooth, everything you write is great. Every young writer feels that way. You don't have that backward look at it, that self-criticism. You have no judgment. But as you grow older, every book becomes a little more difficult because you're more critical of what you're doing. You reach the point where you know something is wrong but you're incapable of making it any better. So I would say the most recent two or three novels were probably the most difficult in that sense. The older writer is the one who has all the great trouble.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you think your writing has changed over the years?

CALDWELL

Yes. Your attitudes and your style do change, in a progressive way, as you grow older. Whether there's improvement or

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not, at least there is change. Otherwise you'd be writing the same all the way through your career. You'd be writing Hardy Boys books or something. But when each work is a separate entity, there will be flux and change as you go.

INTERVIEWERS

As you look back upon your career, do you see it in terms of discernible stages?

CALDWELL

Well, I suppose so. The first stage, of course, was learning how to write, which took eight or ten years during the twenties. Then after that was a period when I was able to make money by writing in a subsidiary way, in Hollywood and so forth. My most productive period was probably from 1950 to 1975. During that time I had the desire, the opportunity, and the material so I did not let up. From 1975 until the present has been my least productive period. You might say I've been recovering from the excesses of life. Now I'm back to normal, I hope.

INTERVIEWERS

Out of this long career, you say you spent almost the first decade learning how to write. Were you also publishing during this period?

CALDWELL

The only way you can learn how to write is by writing; but, yes, when you've written something, you do want to get it published. When I started writing, the little magazines would publish some of what I wrote, and that gave me the impetus to keep on writing. They paid no money; but because I was supporting myself in Maine, raising my own food, I was willing to stay with it for years and years if necessary until something happened. My first short story was published in the little magazine *transition* in Paris.

INTERVIEWERS

We've read that you devoted a year of your apprenticeship in Maine to writing poetry.

CALDWELL

I think every writer has to go through the phase of writing

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poetry. That's almost mandatory. The lucky people, in my opinion, are those who overcome it and start writing fiction instead.

INTERVIEWERS

You gave it up entirely then?

CALDWELL

Oh, sure, I learned my lesson. What gave me the courage to forget about poetry was a chap by the name of Louis Untermeyer. I had such admiration for him that I sent him some of my poems. He wrote to me and said that every young man is entitled to write poetry, but the sooner he gives it up, the better he's going to be as a man. So I took his advice.

INTERVIEWERS

He cured you?

CALDWELL

Yes. And many years later when Untermeyer edited some children's books, he asked me to submit a book for his series. "I know you're out of poetry now," he said, "so perhaps you can write a good child's story."

INTERVIEWERS

And did you write one for him?

CALDWELL

I did. *The Deer at Our House*.

INTERVIEWERS

Did you ever publish any of your poetry, either before or after Untermeyer gave you his advice?

CALDWELL

No, but someone else once tried to. Just before Bourke-White died, a researcher visited her at the house we used to have in Darien, Connecticut. The two of them found some of my poetry stashed away under a window seat. This researcher threatened to publish it without my permission, but I told him he was going to get sued and arrested and maybe shot. Anyway,

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he's quieted down now and hasn't done anything about it.

INTERVIEWERS

Besides poetry, your apprentice period produced your first extended fiction, *The Bastard* and *Poor Fool*. How do you now regard these early novelettes?

CALDWELL

As experimental, preliminary, amateurish, but I think necessary to make the transition from a brief short story to a novel. They were basically imaginary—an attempt to find out how to present imaginative ideas realistically. I am much in favor of what I did, but I would not do it now. You have to go through that stage just as much as you have to go through the poetry stage and get rid of it.

INTERVIEWERS

An early apprenticeship work that is rather poetic is *The Sacrilege of Alan Kent*. How does it strike you today?

CALDWELL

It too was experimental, a little bit self-conscious maybe. It served its purpose at the time, but it was not traditional enough. It was not in the great tradition of fiction.

INTERVIEWERS

A recent French-English edition of *The Sacrilege of Alan Kent*, published by Galerie Maeght, was lavishly illustrated by Alexander Calder. How did this collaborative effort come about?

CALDWELL

Well, Marcel Duhamel, who was my translator for many years, got together with Virginia in Paris one night and they decided to get this book done in an illustrated limited edition. Duhamel said, "Picasso will do it!" You see, Picasso was his neighbor at Antibes and he knew him very well. When I was visiting Duhamel, I met Picasso down on the beach one night and went to his house. We did not have a common language and about all we could do was smile, nod, and improvise ges-

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tures. During the hour, we had several drinks and passed comments via Marcel's interpretations. Picasso's parting handshake was warm and intensely firm and clinging. Anyway, Picasso put the book on his schedule but died before he got to it. Duhamel did not get discouraged, though. He just said, "Sandy Calder can do it just as well as Picasso or better. I'll get him!" And he did.

INTERVIEWERS

You mentioned a period after your apprenticeship in which you made money, in a subsidiary way, from your writing. Would you explain what you meant by this?

CALDWELL

I was in a high salary bracket in Hollywood off and on, and I also had an interest in the Broadway production of *Tobacco Road* which ran for seven or eight years.

INTERVIEWERS

What did you think of Jack Kirkland's dramatization of *Tobacco Road*?

CALDWELL

I would say that Kirkland's version is true and authentic for dramatic purposes. By that I mean he had to manipulate the story to create dramatic highlights for the stage. I had great admiration for Henry Hull, the actor who first played Jeeter Lester, because he played the part straight. But I objected to the actors after Hull who portrayed Lester, both on Broadway and in the touring companies, because they played principally to get laughs. Now Kirkland didn't like this either, but the producer was happy with the big box office and his authority was almost final.

INTERVIEWERS

What about the movie version of *Tobacco Road*? Did you like it?

CALDWELL

Not particularly, no. It had good actors, good actresses, a good screen writer, and John Ford directing. It had everything in its favor. But then Darryl Zanuck came along and wanted a

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happy ending. So the characters go off to the poorhouse singing a folk song.

INTERVIEWERS

Did Zanuck's interference surprise you?

CALDWELL

Not really. Movies were made pretty much under a studio formula. My agent told me that the movie of my novel *Claudelle Inglish* was so poor that I shouldn't even bother to see it. So I didn't.

INTERVIEWERS

What about the film of *God's Little Acre*? Were you any more satisfied with it?

CALDWELL

Yes, because it was done independently, without any studio control. The studios were very union bound and might have toned down the part about the mill strike. Of course, I didn't have much to do with it except as an advisor here and there, but the freedom of an independent production was very interesting to me. At least nobody ordered a happy ending put on it.

INTERVIEWERS

You say you advised the producers of *God's Little Acre*. Did you ever take a more direct part in translating your books into movies or plays?

CALDWELL

Well, *Journeyman* had a disastrous career for several weeks on Broadway. Then I came along and tried to doctor the script. I didn't succeed, though, and the whole thing eventually flopped. I never felt qualified as a dramatist because I had no training.

INTERVIEWERS

So you never attempted to write a complete play?

CALDWELL

Oh, one of my misfortunes in life was that I wrote a musical

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for Broadway. About Mexican politicians. The principal actor, or singer, was to portray the President of Mexico. But this touched on a lot of toes in the State Department. Somebody there thought it might cause a diplomatic rub if we showed the President of Mexico chasing girls around the adobe walls and singing. So it never got produced. I don't think it was a very good musical anyway.

INTERVIEWERS

Did you give it a title?

CALDWELL

Sure, sure. *The Strong Man of Maxcatan*. The script is in the Dartmouth College Archives, so maybe someday it'll get resurrected.

INTERVIEWERS

Were any of the movies you worked on in Hollywood particularly interesting to you?

CALDWELL

Not especially. My early writing there was for a series of shorts called *Crime Does Not Pay*. Then I worked on *Mission to Moscow*, which was a propaganda film. The studio wanted me for it because of my experiences in the Soviet Union during the war. But I did not like the propaganda angle. After some preliminary writing on it, I asked to be relieved.

INTERVIEWERS

You said earlier that you need privacy when you write. Did working in a studio environment present any difficulties for you?

CALDWELL

Yes. For one thing, in the old days in Hollywood you couldn't be a writer unless you could dictate your story to a secretary, and I never could dictate to anybody. So I had to go home at night to write where nobody could see me. I used to write in secret.

INTERVIEWERS

Did your Hollywood experiences help your fiction writing?

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CALDWELL

Not a bit. It was just a waste of time. It's impossible to write your fiction and work in the studio at the same time. I wasn't doing anything except hack work for five or six years. But, I needed the money and the longer you stay, the more they pay you.

INTERVIEWERS

How did you finally get out?

CALDWELL

Saved enough so I could quit. In 1950 I quit cold and I haven't been back since.

INTERVIEWERS

Were you happy to get back to your fiction after the Hollywood years?

CALDWELL

Very happy. After that deadly period I spent the next twenty-five years trying to catch up, to write what I had not had the opportunity to do. From 1950 to 1975 I probably wrote more stories, more novels, and more books of nonfiction than in any other period.

INTERVIEWERS

Which did you prefer, writing short stories or writing novels?

CALDWELL

To me short-story writing is the essence of writing. I think a writer should always write short stories before he tries to write a novel. You have better control because a short story is concentrated into a small area. You also have better range because a short story can be anywhere from one to fifty pages long. You can mold it much better than you can a novel. A novel is a great, expansive thing. You can't make a change at one point without affecting something another fifty pages away.

INTERVIEWERS

But your short-story production seems to have tapered off during the fifties.

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CALDWELL

Well, you're always going to like short-story writing better than novel writing. But once you accomplish the short story form, you're really stuck with it. So I wrote 150 and quit. Of course, 150 were probably only half of what got written. The other half I threw into the wastebasket.

INTERVIEWERS

We have read that two of your novels, *The Bogus Ones* and *Autumn Hill*, were never published. Do you have many other unpublished manuscripts?

CALDWELL

No, they go in the wastebasket. The two novels you mention are the only ones I can recall that I completed but never published. And they were not good enough to be published.

INTERVIEWERS

You said that your most productive period ended in 1975. What caused this?

CALDWELL

The past five years have been sort of a fallow period because I did too much traveling, going to Europe twice a year and so forth. And I also took two years out to have cancer operations on my lungs. I almost killed myself smoking cigarettes.

INTERVIEWERS

I notice you haven't smoked during this interview. Did you quit completely?

CALDWELL

Oh, yes. About six years ago. My doctor at the Mayo Clinic told me I had to if I wanted to keep on living. So I crossed the street to a bar and ordered a drink. I had two cigarettes left in a pack, and I put both in my mouth and smoked them at the same time. I haven't had one since.

INTERVIEWERS

Mrs. Caldwell said that you came close to doing a book on President Carter.

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CALDWELL

What happened there was that just after Jimmy Carter was elected President, the people at Dodd, Mead wanted me to write a book about him and his hometown. It was supposed to be illustrated with photographs. But there was no great money involved—everything was more or less on "spec"—so I doubt that we could have gotten the kind of photography we wanted. The idea was interesting, I thought, but eventually it just evaporated.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you think the Carter family's Southern folksiness is authentic?

CALDWELL

I think so. That menage is fairly typical of others that I have known, particularly in Georgia. My feeling about them is that they're just average, down-home Southern people in many ways. They're very close-knit, very friendly, and very outspoken. I've known many men like Billy Carter who drink beer all day and ride around in a pickup truck. In fact, I'd probably rather do a book on Billy than on Jimmy. He's more of a character.

INTERVIEWERS

Your new book, *A Year of Living*, has so far taken you a year and a half to write. Would you describe your daily writing schedule for that book?

CALDWELL

Well, for this particular book I got into the habit of working twice a day. I am here at the typewriter at six o'clock with the lights on every morning and work until ten or eleven o'clock. Then from four until seven I'll be back at it again.

INTERVIEWERS

Did other books have different schedules?

CALDWELL

Yes, I used to have all kinds of schedules. Years ago, in the state of Maine, I chose to write my book on even days and work

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outside on odd days. When winter came, I shovelled snow and slept a little during the day, then stayed up all night to write. Another early method I used was to take a trip to write a short story. I'd ride a bus, from Boston to Cleveland maybe, and get off at night once in a while to write. I'd do a story that way in about a week's time. Then, for a while, I took the night boats between Boston and New York. The Fall River Line, the New Bedford Line, the Cape Cod Line, all going to New York at night. The rhythm of the water might have helped my sentence structure a little; at least I thought it did. Those were all early methods, or schedules, of writing. Everything since then has been a little bit different.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you ever have several different writing projects going at the same time?

CALDWELL

No, only one thing at a time. And I stick with it for six months, eight months, nine months, whatever it takes.

INTERVIEWERS

You have been an active writer now for almost sixty years. What motivates your continuous devotion?

CALDWELL

Well, some people are addicted to singing to themselves. It's the same way with writing, I suppose. I write because it makes me feel good.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you worry about what the critics will say about a book?

CALDWELL

Not at all. A critic is an egotist. "I am the judge," he says. He will wreck an author's work by tearing it apart and never getting it back together again. Of course, there are some good people in that field, but I just don't have much faith in what I call a critic. A critic is a superfluous commodity.

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INTERVIEWERS

Is there any particular audience whose attention you do appreciate?

CALDWELL

Well, in that sense you might say I write for the ordinary man in the street, the golden mean. If I'm appealing to that sort of person, I'm happy. For example, a couple of weeks ago Virginia and I were at the annual ceremonial of the American Academy and Institute in New York. Of course, the American Academy and Institute is a collection of very high-class intellects. Everybody's a big brain. On this particular occasion I was talking to Malcolm Cowley, I think, when a waiter came up with a tray of hors d'oeuvres. He was just a young punk, maybe a student at NYU working as a waiter. Anyway, he said, "Take one.... Now shake hands with me. You're the one person here I want to shake hands with." So I shook hands with the guy and took another hors d'oeuvre.

INTERVIEWERS

Why do you think your popularity as a writer has diminished until recently in this country but has remained steadfast abroad?

CALDWELL

Fiction in America changes almost from one day to the next. We are still a very volatile civilization, whereas in an older country there is very little change except in a political sense. In America, fiction reflects current lifestyles, economic conditions, wars, lots of things. The interests of American readers change with the times. Especially here, writing has to be contemporary. But I don't know that any writer anywhere should consider his work immortal.

INTERVIEWERS

You don't sound very concerned with achieving a lasting popularity.

CALDWELL

I have never been interested in popularity because popularity doesn't mean much. To be popular you have to be ex-

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ploited.

INTERVIEWERS

What kinds of books are publishers exploiting today?

CALDWELL

Well, they've gone heavily into what they call the Big Book, something 700 to 1,000 pages long. In recent years the American storyteller has been pretty well shunted aside by this blatant pressure to provide the best seller. There is no imagination being applied anymore in a storytelling sense. And the best seller itself is nothing more than a formula.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you plan to write any more fiction?

CALDWELL

I've reached the point where I'm too critical of fiction right now. I'm too abashed by the trashiness of a lot of current fiction to enter into it. The great compendium of knowledge that goes into a James Michener book, *Centennial* for example, does not interest me. At present I don't see anything in between the trashy novel and the encyclopedic novel, so I'll wait it out. I think the novel's at a stage where something will surface between these two extremes. But what it will be, I don't know.

INTERVIEWERS

Could it be the journalistic novel, such as *In Cold Blood* and *The Executioner's Song*?

CALDWELL

In my opinion that will be a very short-lived pattern. I think it is an attempt to find what the next phase of the novel is going to be. Of course, the Capote book was the first of that kind; then Mailer's came along. I've glanced at *The Executioner's Song* and parts of it seem to me to be purely extraneous to the story. The excerpts from newspapers, for example, are just a compendium of a lot of clippings. They had nothing to do with Mailer's writing at all. Well, to me that doesn't have much of a future.

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INTERVIEWERS

Do you think storytelling itself will come back?

CALDWELL

It will have to. It's inevitable that storytelling will come back because storytelling is the whole basis of fiction. That's where new ideas originate.

INTERVIEWERS

Mark Twain was one of America's greatest storytellers. In an interview a number of years ago you said you hadn't read any of his work.

CALDWELL

I haven't yet. It's something to look forward to. I've heard so much about him.

INTERVIEWERS

You said once that you admired Sherwood Anderson's short stories.

CALDWELL

Yes. In those days there were plenty of novels in existence but very few good short stories. What interested me about Sherwood Anderson were his short stories. I liked the brevity. I liked the way he presented his people. His style was lean. It was not cluttered up with superfluous adjectives and unnecessary paragraphs.

INTERVIEWERS

You have often been compared to Faulkner. How do you feel about that comparison?

CALDWELL

I don't know, because I don't know anything about Faulkner's writing. I read one of his books, *As I Lay Dying*, which I thought was a very fine exercise in writing. But I read it only to find out what he was doing, and I don't know what he did before or since. I met Faulkner a couple of times, once in France and once in New York, but I was not well acquainted with him. The only subject of conversation with him that I can recall was

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the difficulty of talking to anyone in a foreign language when a person has the use of only his native language.

INTERVIEWERS

Have there been any writers over the years with whom you have been well acquainted?

CALDWELL

Oh no. I don't mingle with other writers because it's a bad class of people. My friendships have always been with the young ladies of life.

INTERVIEWERS

What have you got against other writers?

CALDWELL

They never talk about anything interesting, just about themselves and their work. The only writers I ever got along really well with were William Saroyan and a chap by the name of Pep West, Nathanael West. I knew him in New York and in Hollywood. These two were the only ones I had any great interest in knowing because they did not talk about their work all the time. They talked about cigars, anything.

INTERVIEWERS

But surely you knew other writers?

CALDWELL

Oh, I've known a few more or less casually. I knew Sherwood Anderson fairly well. Once when he was in Arizona he spent a week with me in Tucson. I also got to know Steinbeck pretty well, in Mexico and again in New York. Aside from those people I got to know Theodore Dreiser slightly. He was another slave in Hollywood when I was there. In fact, we both had the same agent. Then Sinclair Lewis used to stop at my house in Connecticut on his way to the country sometimes. But I would not say I ever had any deep friendships with other writers.

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INTERVIEWERS

Writers traditionally are notorious for having difficulty sustaining marriages. Is divorce an occupational hazard?

CALDWELL

Yes, and I'll tell you why. Whoever is not the writer in the family always gets the short end of the stick.That's because a writer has to be somewhat selfish. For example, I'm a retiring person in social life or in any other kind of life. I suppose you'd call me almost a recluse. I don't take days off. I work on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. Well, a woman can resent that, and eventually something is going to give somewhere along the way. Of course, once in a while there is a very even-spirited person who can take all this, and that's why some writers do stay married. But as a rule, no, they don't.

INTERVIEWERS

Have you enjoyed your fame and fortune?

CALDWELL

Well, I'm happy to be able to live the kind of life that I've lived. But early in life I had a difficult time. Step by step I acquired marriages, and after each of the first three I was divided up. I lost three good houses—one in Maine, one in Connecticut, and one in Tucson. But I'm much smarter now. I put everything in Virginia's name, so I can never lose it. The car, the house, everything's in her name. So now I'm safe.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you have any superstitions about writing?

CALDWELL

I have a red rug in my room. Wherever I've lived in life, I've carried my red rug with me. I keep it in excellent shape. I have it vacuumed; I have it dry-cleaned. We are sitting on it now, in fact. Why is it here? We have a very good carpet underneath. But I've got a reason for wanting it here. It's part of my life.

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Back in the early days I had to live on cold and splintery floors. There was a hardwood floor in Maine that was especially cold because the room I worked in was unheated. Now, an unheated room in a New England winter is sort of a difficult dungeon. Then, in South Carolina, I was confined to write for awhile in a rented room with a linoleum floor. The linoleum was cracked and it bristled with splinters. Anytime I didn't have my shoes on, I'd get a splinter in my foot. Well, as soon as I could afford to get a good rug, I bought my red one. And I decided then that I'd carry my red rug with me wherever I went.

INTERVIEWERS

And your black socks? You said on the phone the other day that we would recognize you by them, and I notice you've worn black socks every day.

CALDWELL

On a Sunday I wear white socks. Thick white athletic socks for the outdoors. You should see me on a Sunday sometime.

—**Elizabeth Pell Broadwell**
Ronald Wesley Hoag

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The Host

Craig Nova

In America the host had a driver whose name was Carolyn. She was twenty-four years old, tall, had studied classic languages, disliked teaching and modeling, and was glad to drive for the host. When they went through those flat lands in the midwest or south, she dressed in a black silk stocking that came up to her neck and gloves which fit her hands perfectly. She had smallish breasts and very long legs, pronounced bones in her shoulders, a long, smooth neck. When they drove over these roads, Carolyn was allowed to enjoy the speed of the car, which was usually long, dark, vulgar, carefully maintained and modified. On flat stretches Carolyn let it out to a hundred and fifty or more miles per hour, and occasionally the host put the lip of a champagne glass so that she could sip it and she would taste the wine and feel the bubbles in her nose and push the accelerator just a touch more. They argued about translations of Ancient Greek texts, or Anglo-Saxon poems, and they never stopped at motels: Carolyn said she enjoyed the tension more the way things were, even though she was in love with the host, and had told him that she would marry him at any time.

The host was in his early forties, was over six feet-four inches tall, in good condition. He was educated, wealthy, although some of his amusements, the hunt included, were difficult to explain. He was unlike other men in number of ways, the first being that he understood the moment, the present, as though

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it had taken place years before and that he had had that time to think about what had taken place. He always knew when he had been insulted, and how to take a compliment. He seemed to fit, whether in Seattle, or Lisbon, the lesser known ports of call along the north coast of Africa, or the resorts and small towns in the Pyrenees. If you saw his round, large, and not too friendly face opposite yours as you sat at a bar or on a terrace with a view of the Adriatic, you would be concerned, but not frightened and perhaps relieved that there was someone, who, without saying a word, gave the impression that he understood those fears that made your hands sweat, that made you awkward, or, worst of all, in the man's not too pleasant presence there was an acceptance or grace that covered those things you had to live with because there was nothing else to be done. The host was told many stories. He did not pry.

"Who have you invited for next fall?" said Carolyn.

The host mentioned the engineer, the man from the Pacific Northwest.

"There are plenty more," said the host, "it is just a matter of finding them."

Carolyn pursed her lips, asked this way for champagne. The speedometer was mounted on the dashboard and had an industrial, machined quality; it read one fifty-five.

"How would you take a deer?" asked the host.

"The best way to kill a man is when he's fucking," said Carolyn, "I guess the same holds true for deer."

The host sipped the champagne and watched the flat, dark landscape approach.

"I know a wonderful hotel in San Francisco. In San Francisco there won't be any separate rooms."

"I'll think about it," said Carolyn.

The car slowed down a little as Carolyn approached a farm.

"The tension always begins again," said the host. "Always. So it's not as though you'd be giving that up."

Carolyn watched the speedometer for a moment, and then the lines that flashed by on the road so quickly as to seem to be one blurry, white stripe.

"So then it would be even harder, or more difficult?" said

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Carolyn.

"Yes, of course," said the host.

"In an old language," said Carolyn, "tell me that way. I want to hear old words."

"*Dulce et decorum est*," said the host, "that it should be so, that things will be more tense."

"Sweet and fitting," Carolyn said, as she glanced from the speedometer to the host and then nodded.

They spent a week in the hotel in San Francisco.

In the late spring the host visited the monasteries of Russia and Pakistan, or churches in France, Spain, or Italy, retreats in Ethiopia, the shrines in Japan. The men who maintained them always felt remotely failed in front of the tall, thick American who stood before them, showing respect, but having such a look of piercing understanding in his eyes. Some, unable to stop themselves, had asked advice about some problem, about some trouble that gave no rest, and the host was only able to listen, and to let the expression in his eyes be seen.

There was one occasion when the host had been prevailed upon to speak of himself. This was in England, when in an Anglican church with its dark reliefs of paganism on the ceiling, a priest of about the host's own age admitted that he had indulged in some practices not wholly Christian, and that he was confused and living without comfort.

The host said he conducted a hunt each year, and that there was a moment in it, or at it, that gave him respite, and this moment was dear to him and it came only when the right combination of men were present, and even then it didn't last long.

"And what is that?" said the Anglican.

"I'm sorry," said the host. "You'd have to be there, and, as much as I've enjoyed speaking to you, I'm afraid I can't give you an invitation."

"But what is the moment?" said the Anglican.

The host waited for awhile, looking at the pagan figures which were above the pillars of the church.

"It is the toast and the time immediately afterward," said the host.

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LITERARY HAPPENINGS: CHINA

Introductory Note

Dong Leshan's short story, "The Topsy-Turvy World of Professor Fu," which is featured in the following material, was selected for publication in the Paris Review *not for its literary value, but rather for being an interesting and illuminating example of contemporary Chinese short fiction. Perhaps the scene of Professor Fu and his wife agonizing over what objects of Western culture to keep and what to throw away as "degenerate" during the difficult times of the Great Cultural Revolution would excite the imagination of a western-world author, but the resolutions as revealed in Dong Leshan's story are utterly foreign to a non-Chinese. To help set the story in an understandable perspective, Timothy Tung, who translated the story, has provided not only an introduction, but also a postscript-interview in which he talks with Dong Leshan about "The Topsy-Turvy World of Professor Fu."*

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INTRODUCTION
by Timothy Tung

Traditionally, Chinese readers have always had a fondness for short stories. In the five years since October, 1976, which marked the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of a new era, some 10,000 short stories have appeared in some 150 periodicals. published in localities all over China, a few even in the languages of national minority groups such as Uighur, Mongolian, and Tibetan. Readership of some of these magazines is astronomically high, the most popular being Tianjin's *Story Monthly*, carrying short stories exclusively, with a circulation of well over a million. Another monthly magazine that prints short stories and sells over a million copies each issue is *People's Literature*, an organ of China's Writers' Union. Other similar journals include *Peking Literature*, *Shanghai Literature*, *Anhui Literature*, and Canton's *Flower City*, all with circulation in the hundreds of thousands.

The first stories to appear after the downfall of the Gang of Four were referred to as the so-called "wound literature"—that is to say a flood of emotion-packed stories exposing the scars that the reign of the Gang had inflicted on the body and soul of the populace.

Such stories as this found enormous popularity with people desperate for an outlet to relieve their pent-up anger for the sufferings they had endured. The first to attract attention was "The Wound," written by Lu Xinhua, a Shanghai college student—a story of a young girl compelled to denounce her mother, a party cadre of long standing who has been accused of being a "renegade" by young Red Guards. To show her determination the young girl volunteers to go to work on a farm in the northernmost part of China, yet still suffers discrimination because of her background. Later, when her mother is exonerated, the daughter seeks a reconciliation, but after a long train trip, she finds the long-suffering woman dead in the hospital.

"Wound literature" soon gave way to stories written with biting humor and a twist of irony in the great tradition of Lu

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Xun—the venerated satirist whose centennial has just been celebrated. The traditional sense of humor, often self-deprecating in nature, is returning. The Chinese can again laugh at themselves and others without feeling intimidated. This trend is being manifested most forcefully in the writing of short stories—the short story being the most popular form of reading for an average Chinese.

Such are plots of new short stories in China today:

¶ A poor man who has lived on a boat all his life is finally to have his dream of owning a house realized after Liberation. He is given land and he makes plans to save money and materials to build his own house. But each time he has accumulated some money and bricks and planks, he is persuaded by government officials to donate them to public construction use. Thirty years later, he has collected enough government citations to paste over all the walls of his new house—which is still a dream.

¶ A peasant goes to town to sell homemade wheatcakes, hoping to earn enough money to buy himself a new hat. While in town, he falls ill and is taken in the limousine of a local party secretary, who happens to be an old friend, to a government hostel to rest. All the money he has earned is just enough to pay for the night's lodging. On the return to his village, he is hailed as a celebrity for having ridden in the official's sedan and stayed in a government mansion. He is still without a hat.

¶ A high party official, in disgrace during the reign of the Gang of Four, is befriended by a lowly barber in the government guest house where he is under house arrest. Later, after he has been reinstated in an important position, he finds that he no longer has anything in common with his old friend, although he does miss the times when the barber's friendship had been so important to him. The barber is bewildered.

Most contemporary Chinese writers gain their fame by entering and winning in national competitions. The first yearly competition for short stories, sponsored by the editorial board of *People's Literature*, was held at the end of 1978. Some 31,000 readers responded, recommending a total of 1,285 stories from various magazines. Out of these reader-rec-

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ommended entries, a special committee of twenty-three well-known writers selected twenty-five stories as prize winners. With a few exceptions, the winning authors were all relatively young and unknown, and their stories nearly all reflect the sufferings and the hurt in life during the period of what the Chinese now like to call "the ten-year calamity."

By the time the second national short-story competition (for the year 1979) was held, readers' response proved beyond the sponsors' wildest expectations. Within a hundred days of the announcement, the editorial board of *People's Literature* received 257,885 ballots from readers nominating their favorite stories. Again, as in the previous years, twenty-five stories were chosen as the best of the year. Of readers taking the trouble to send in their recommendations, forty percent were workers, twenty percent each were students and cadres, ten percent were teachers, and the rest were peasants, soldiers and others.

The 1979 crop improved in quality as well as numbers. New writing styles and techniques were tried, and the Chinese have even begun to talk about "the stream of consciousness method." Subject matter is no longer limited to the glory of socialism; writers begin to feel free to go beyond their obsession with the crimes of the Gang of Four. Love (between men and women, not between men or women and tractors) has again become a favorite subject although descriptions of physical love are still taboo. In Zhang Jie's "Love Cannot Be Forgotten," the relationship between a woman writer and a married veteran cadre is only a platonic one.

Interest in new writers has also brought about renewed enthusiasm in older, more established writers who had been silenced for many years. In the fall of 1979, Shanghai Art and Literature Publishing House brought out an anthology entitled *Twice In Blossom*, reintroducing works of writers made known in 1956, the first "Let a hundred flowers blossom" period. It represents 17 authors in 20 stories. Since its publication, a number of veterans have again come to the fore. The first to evoke fond memories is Liu Binyan who, while working as an editor of the newspaper *China Youth* in the 1950s, wrote the now classic "On the Bridge Building Site" and "Restricted

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Information From This Newspaper," both essentially news features exposing inefficiency and abuses of bureaucrats but written as fiction. Barely 30 years old then, Liu Binyan overnight became one of China's favorite writers. Today he works as a reporter of the *People's Daily*, once again using fiction techniques to report on the darker side of the system. His recent piece "Between Man and Demon," satirizing certain aspects of bureaucratism, has quickly become a classic.

Another important writer is Wang Meng, whose 1955 short story "The Young Newcomer in the Organization Department," in which he mocked party bureaucrats, is once again being read by a new generation of young people. A prolific writer since his reappearance on the literary scene in 1979, he has produced many stories, one of which, "The Most Precious Thing," won the award as one of the best stories of 1979. The moral of this story is that even under severe tests such as the Cultural Revolution one must not act against one's conscience. The party secretary of a certain city returns home from a memorial service for an old friend, who succumbed to political persecution, only to find that his own son was the informer who had betrayed the friend's hiding place. When the son comes home, all too cheerfully, to announce that he has just been admitted to the party, a great honor, the father weeps for the young man's loss of what he considers the most precious thing: conscience.

Perhaps one of the most encouraging signs of new Chinese fiction is the revival of intellectualism. Intellectuals of the older generation, undaunted by years of humiliation, have begun to produce and to be noticed. One good example of such writing is the story which follows, "Professor Fu's Topsy-Turvy World," written by the well-known translator Dong Leshan. It won the first prize in the short-story contest conducted in 1980 by Shanghai's newspaper for intellectuals, *Wenhui Bao*. In it, Dong wryly describes the professor's perplexity at the meaning of society's values being turned upside down during the unstable period of anti-intellectualism.

Dong Leshan, currently a visiting scholar at Cornell University on a Luce Foundation grant, is a senior research fellow at

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the Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He started his literary career as a poet and drama critic in the early forties. Since then he has served as head of the translation department of Xinhua (New China) News Agency, taught English, and been professor of journalism at the graduate school of the Academy. Among his translation works, William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* sold more than 300,000 copies and Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*, 1,350,000 copies. He is also the translator of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Already printed as "internal" reading matter whose readership is restricted to those above a certain level in party hierarchy, there is a strong possibility that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will be openly issued to the public—before the year 1984, many hope.

Occasionally producing a short story, one or two a year, Dong Leshan now devotes most of his time to doing research on contemporary American literature and history.

THE TOPSY-TURVY WORLD OF PROFESSOR FU

Dong Leshan

That a son was born to Professor Fu Chengyi in his later years was much talked about among those undergoing thought-reform through labor at the May Seventh Cadre School.

Professor Fu and his beloved Zhang Tieying had been married for more than twenty years before the arrival of this child, their first. A small and fragile woman, Mrs. Fu had at first thought that the cause for her non-conception was physiological, but several examinations in the hospital provided no clues. Then Professor Fu himself went in for a thorough checkup, which only showed that everything was normal. They had been wondering about their misfortune but could do nothing about

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it. Luckily, Professor Fu was a broad-minded person who cared little about having an heir. A bookish man, he spent his time reading rather than brooding. Life's little pleasures did not concern him: he dressed casually, and he was not particularly fussy about what he ate or drank. His wife did all the housework. Often, to ease her anxiety, he would say: "Maybe it's better without children. We're spared of the bother of baby-feeding and diaper-washing."

Yet his wife never gave up hope. Mother-love being women's nature, Mrs. Fu, not having her own children, envied others. Each Sunday, when she saw neighbors pick up their little ones from the nursery and play with them in the courtyard, or when she saw parents in neat blue suits, dress up their children like "flowers of Motherland" to take them out to the streets and parks, she would exclaim longingly: "Look, other households are always so full of life on Sundays!"

"But we have music, which is much better than crowding in the park."

Both Professor and Mrs. Fu were music-lovers. Mrs. Fu also played the piano well, having learned her skill in a missionary school when she was young. A connoisseur of Western classical music, Professor Fu could talk expertly about Beethoven, Brahms, the world's famous violin concertos, and any number of well-known tenors and sopranos. Just by listening to records he could identify world-renowned symphony orchestras and instrumentalists. So came Sundays, while neighbors' houses were full of children's noises, from Professor Fu's home floated only the pleasant sounds of music. It might be his wife playing Chopin on the piano, or it might be himself playing a Bach record. He would sit in the only easy chair in the house, head back, eyes closed, enjoying masterpieces of man's creation. Friends dropping in would comment enviously: "Well, you two surely are lucky to be able to enjoy yourselves like this!"

But good times did not last. After a few years of such idyllic life came the Great Cultural Revolution. It looked as if two of Professor Fu's most treasured items, books of foreign literature and records of Western classical music, were in danger. Mrs. Fu's chief concern was her piano, a secondhand German Bech-

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stein acquired when they were first married. It had cost 800 yuan, a large portion of Professor Fu's savings from earnings of his writings. Only recently, a piano tuner had praised it, saying that pianos of such quality had become a rarity, and that it might fetch 1,800 yuan now if they wanted to sell it. Well, money was not all that important to Professor and Mrs. Fu. If they sold it, they would not be able to afford such a good one later on. Besides, it had sentimental value.

The day the edict was issued calling upon people to turn in all the "feudal, bourgeois, revisionist" books and other items in their possession, one of Professor Fu's students, a member of the Rebel Faction of the Red Guards, came surreptitiously to warn them. Assuming a serious manner, he lectured Professor Fu.

"Fu Chengyi!" (That was the time when students called a professor by his full name just to show their contempt. Some still a little respectful might call him Old Fu, but only when no one else was around.) "Fu Chengyi," he said. "You must take the initiative and turn in your degenerate books and records. Otherwise they will ransack your home and you will be in trouble."

Professor Fu understood the situation. That whole night he worked at sorting out those books and records that had to be handed in. At first, he thought it would be simpler just to give up everything. But while packing he began to have second thoughts. Picking this book up, putting that book down, he could not make up his mind. With Mrs. Fu's help, passing books to him one by one from the shelves, he looked at each title to determine to which of the two piles it would belong: the pile on the right, to go, the pile on the left, to stay. For books such as Marx and Lenin works, little red books of Chairman Mao's quotations, reports of the struggle between the two roads of socialism or capitalism, it was easy. But many a time it was difficult to decide on a particular item, and after some hesitation it would end up on the pile on the right. Once, Mrs. Fu passed on to him Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. Without thinking he put it down on the left pile.

"Why do you want to keep this?" his wife asked. "Isn't this

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pornography?"

"What? Tolstoy's *Resurrection* pornography?" Professor Fu had never heard of such nonsense before.

"I don't know. But some newspaper articles seem to say so."

"On what ground do they brand this pornography?"

"On the ground that the story is about a prostitute."

"Oh, good heavens!"

After a moment of silence, he removed the book from the pile on the left and threw it to the right.

Records caused no hesitation. They were all degenerate, feudal, bourgeois, revisionist music. Painful though it was, he surrendered them all.

Since he had taken the initiative, the Rebel Faction did not come to their house. Thus was the piano saved. Even had the Rebels searched their house, perhaps not all his records would have been taken away. After all, when he was later detained in the "Concentration Center for Freaks, Demons and Monsters," a sort of concentration camp where class enemies of all descriptions were gathered, he could hear music being played on the phonograph by the Rebel students serving as guards; some of the records, he could tell, were clearly his. Now if the Rebels themselves liked his music, these records ought not necessarily to be degenerate. Well, every record had been lost now; it was too late to feel sorry for himself.

Although the piano had not been carted away, no one cared to play it anymore. Every day was quiet, with the piano shut and covered with cloth. On Sundays, the two sat in silence facing each other, for there was not much to do or to talk about.

Unable to bear the silence any longer, Mrs. Fu one day urged her husband: "Let's adopt a little girl before we get too old. It would be nice to have someone to care for us in our old age."

In the past Professor Fu would have objected. This time he kept quiet. For a while he could not digest what he was reading, so he put the book aside: "All right, let's do it as you say."

Before long, through the help of a friend who was the head nurse of a women's hospital, Professor and Mrs. Fu brought home from the hospital a fair-skinned, little baby girl.

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It had been a tense day. At lunchtime, the hospital had telephoned to say that they must pick up the baby the same afternoon, giving them no time to get baby clothes, milk bottles and diapers ready, not to mention hiring a wet nurse. Over the telephone Mrs. Fu asked her friend, the head nurse, whether they could come the next day.

"No, no," the head nurse said. "The hospital insists that it be today."

"I need time to get ready. Why can't we just delay one day?"

"Because we're afraid the mother might change her mind. We don't want to have a lot of noise and tears when you take the baby."

"I haven't even looked at the baby." Mrs. Fu was a bit uneasy.

"Don't worry. I've got good judgment. The baby is adorable. She is round and fair, with huge eyes."

Who could foretell that only a few busy days after the baby had come to her new home, Professor and Mrs. Fu received the notice that they were to be sent down to the Cadre School in Henan Province for thought-reform through physical labor? This time, unlike previous times, both husbands and wives were ordered to go. According to the Army representative announcing the order in the meetings, this was done so as to "thoroughly break up the comfortable nests of you stinking intellectuals."

Professor and Mrs. Fu could do nothing but put up the baby for foster care with a neighborhood woman. Then they padlocked their house and went down to the country with the others.

Though their "comfortable nest" had been broken up, both Professor and Mrs. Fu reaped gains from three years of labor in the Cadre School. For Professor Fu, it was the skill of carpentry that he learned. He could now repair broken chairs and tables and build small stools. For his wife, a few years of physical work had strengthened her body and improved her health. It then came as a happy surprise when, having passed the age of forty, she discovered she was pregnant.

Everyone who heard of this good news exclaimed in wonder.

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"Impossible!"

"You're kidding!"

"That's like an iron tree coming into bloom."

The rules of the Cadre School required that all births take place at the local clinic. But Mrs. Fu's age and the fact that this was to be her first birth caused the school to make an exception. Not wanting to be responsible for any mishaps because of Mrs. Fu's condition, the Cadre School permitted her to return home to Peking for the birth. Professor Fu received a two-week "paternity leave" to accompany his wife.

Thus was the son born.

The news came back, greatly delighting the Cadre School. Some comrades composed a comic poem to celebrate the event, titled: "Fu Chengyi begets an heir at an old age; Zhang Tieying blossoms after a thousand years." It was posted on the bulletin board in the fields in praise of "remolding through labor; creating through labor."

After her maternity leave had expired, Zhang Tieying, which was Mrs. Fu's maiden name, brought the baby back to the Cadre School. So many good-wishers came to see the baby that the room they rented from a farmer was always full. Amidst the chatterings and laughters, she would say, "My son has come by way of the May 7th Path. It's possible that the reason that I could not conceive was that, being raised in a bourgeois family and not having to do any physical work in my youth, my body was not fully developed. Now, after three years of physical improvement through labor, I have been reborn with a matured body. I must thank Chairman Mao. . . ."

She was lucky to have gone to Peking for the birth. Her age and her small frame had caused doctors' concern. In the hospital her pelvis was measured, and it was decided on a Caesarean section. This being her first birth, Zhang Tieying had already been very nervous; now she was even more afraid. But the nurse reassured her that the acupuncture anaesthesia would cause her no pain. It so happened that a foreign guest was visiting the hospital that day. When the nurse administered the needles, she instructed Mrs. Fu comfortingly: "Don't be afraid. You won't have any pain. But you must relax and make

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your own effort in order to have a better result. A foreign guest is here on a visit. We've chosen you as an example to show her the effectiveness of acupuncture anaesthesia. So don't make scenes."

Such encouragement only made Zhang Tieying more tense. Under the knife, she bit her teeth and perspired profusely. The awful pain prevented her from feeling the itch on her cheeks caused by the flowing of perspiration down from the forehead. After the operation, the foreign guest, a white-haired kindly lady, came to hold her hand in sympathy. Asked if she felt any pain, Mrs. Fu, mindful of the nurse's instruction, shook her head, a weak smile on her drained face.

The following day, when Professor Fu was visiting, the head nurse darted in with a newspaper and cheerfully reported: "Look, the foreign guest's visit yesterday made the paper!"

Zhang Tieying confided to her husband: "Chengyi, remember at the time of our wedding I had said that I wanted five children? Now, after this, I don't want any more, ever!"

By the time they returned from their stint in the Cadre School, the adopted daughter they had left behind was nearly four years old. She was very lovable, bright and lively. Although she was not their own, Professor and Mrs. Fu were not prejudiced. Mrs. Fu gave her a nickname Zhao Di, meaning "to invite a brother." They took her back from the neighborhood woman. After much deliberation, they decided to entrust the new baby to the woman. He would come home to them only on weekends; they could be spared of much of the chores like feeding the baby and changing his diapers.

After so many years, Professor and Mrs. Fu only now began to taste the joy of family life. There were neither books to read (libraries had not yet opened their foreign collections) nor music to listen to, so except for doing some carpentry work for relaxation, Professor Fu devoted his whole attention to the children. His wife was even busier. Each evening, after taking Zhao Di home from the daycare center, she would fuss about the clothes Zhao Di wore and her food—washing, cooking, scrubbing. Professor Fu would sit in his easy chair, playing with

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his daughter, singing with her and telling her stories.

Zhao Di slept with her parents in the one big bed. Come Saturday, however, there was the problem of finding sleeping space for their baby son. Their one-room apartment was too small for another bed. The piano, unlike the sewing machine that could be closed when not in use and serve as a table, took up too much space, occupying half the length of one wall. Professor Fu would just as soon sell it. Now that the children had become their whole concern, he no longer thought these things important. But Mrs. Fu would not hear of selling the piano. Finally, Professor Fu said one day: "Let's sell the easy chair to make room."

"Getting rid of the easy chair wouldn't create enough space for a bed."

Professor Fu ignored his wife. He stood in the center of the room (in fact the only spot he could plant his feet), one hand touching the stubble under his chin, and mentally measured the space that the easy chair was taking along the wall. After a while, he said: "Right. Maybe this will be a good idea!"

What he had in mind was to get rid of both the easy chair and the small tea table next to it. This would leave enough space to put in a couch, to be used for sitting during the day and as a bed for their daughter during the night.

Once Professor Fu had made up his mind, he quickly set out to work. First, he opened up the easy chair and took out its five springs. Next, he went twice to Tianqiao, Peking's age-old flea market, to find a few old bed springs from stores selling secondhand furniture. Using a variety of odd pieces of wood, he spent a whole week putting together a couch. He fit in the springs and sewed up the cloth. As a final touch, Mrs. Fu produced slipcovers in flowery patterns on her sewing machine, which had been bought to make children's clothes. The pleated hem of the cover was short enough to reveal four slim legs of the couch, a beautiful job, much like professionally-made couches displayed in a high quality furniture store. So well-constructed was the couch that friends who dropped in could not stop voicing their praises. They said that the product was attractive and practical and that Professor Fu had not

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wasted his time trodding the May 7th Path.

The couch finished, Professor Fu's inspiration knew no bounds, and his ideas expanded to the air space. He built two small cupboards, placing one on top of the bookshelves and attaching the other to the wall. These would store bottles and cans for the children. The bookshelves had already been in such use since so few books were left. So desperate was he for room space that Professor Fu had even toyed with the idea of making their double bed into a "Murphy bed" that could be folded into a closet—he had read about them in foreign novels before he had taken the May 7th Path. But such a big undertaking was beyond the skills learned in the Cadre School.

As it turned out, Professor Fu's imagination exceeded his craftsmanship. His next idea came suddenly when he was telling his daughter a bedtime story.

Each night the little girl wanted her father to tell her a story to put her to sleep. It was Professor Fu himself who started this habit, partly because he wanted some time for himself at night to do his work once he had put the child to rest. At eight each evening, when his wife was in the kitchen washing the children's clothes, he would lie down with his daughter, cuddling her, and tell her stories. To induce the child to fall asleep quickly he would turn out the light, leaving only a faint ray from the kitchen.

Although Professor Fu was an expert in foreign literature, he knew little about children's stories. All he could remember was what he had heard when he was a child. So, before long, the source of his stories dried up. Over and over again he told tales of the emperor's new clothes, the sleeping princess, Cinderella, or the ugly duckling. His daughter had heard these stories so many times that she knew them by heart. Yet she had never gotten tired of hearing them.

But that night it was different. For whatever reason, perhaps because something had not gone her way during the day, she was ill-tempered. Before her Papa could say "Once upon a time," she cried out: "No more Cinderella, no more Sleeping Princesses. Tell me a new story, a different story. . . ."

This caught her father short. "Tell you a new story? Let's

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see.... All right, let me tell you a new story."

Now what new story? He thought hard of the books he had read so that he could make a story out of something. Despite his erudition, inspiration came hard.

"All right," he said. "I'm going to tell you a new story, not about emperors and generals, or princes and princesses. This one is about a scientist."

"Good, good, Papa is telling me a story about a scientist.... What is a scientist?"

"A scientist is a man who invents new things. Let's see. Things like automobiles and radios, they were all invented by scientists.

"Once upon a time, there was a very smart scientist. He invented all kinds of things, things to eat, to wear, things to play with. There were four in the family: Papa, Mama, sister, and little brother. But they lived only in one room. At night, when all four were home, the room became very crowded. The scientist thought: there are still many things I want to invent; I must find a place to work. But this room is so small I don't even know where to put my work table. Without my work table, how can I do my experiments?

"He gave much thought to this problem. Finally he had an idea. One night as he was telling his daughter stories in bed, staring at the ceiling, he began to feel as though he were up there looking down, the floor beneath him now much like the ceiling. He thought to himself: there is so much space wasted on the ceiling. If he could only think of something to make full use of the ceiling, turn the room upside down, doubling the space, wouldn't that be just grand?

"The next day he began to work. He invented shoes that would defy gravity. Anyone wearing these shoes could walk on the ceiling without fear of falling. Even tables and chairs equipped with such a device would stick to the ceiling, upside down. One room would now become two, one on the floor, the other on the ceiling. And Papa and Mama and the children would have separate rooms, not interfering with one another...."

Talking away, Professor Fu felt as though he himself were the

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scientist, standing on the ceiling upside down, head heavy. But he was not falling. Dreamily he had a strong desire to go to the desk in the corner of the ceiling to finish his work in preparation for his class tomorrow. But he could not move; his feet were nailed tight. What if he lifted one foot off the ceiling? With only one foot attached to the ceiling, would he be sucked back down to the earth? His head was so heavy he was afraid he might fall. But did it matter? He was so tired, and down there was the big spring bed. He would only drop on its soft, comfortable surface for a good sleep. . . .

A sudden tremble shook the house. Professor Fu awoke with a start. He could hear door and window frames cracking. Earthquake! He jumped off the bed and turned on the light. "Earthquake! Earthquake!" he called out, waking up his wife. He grabbed his daughter, wrapped a blanket around her, and ran out to the courtyard, followed by Mrs. Fu.

Already the courtyard was full of people, noisily chattering, each fighting to tell how he was awakened by the shake.

Professor Fu looked at his watch: half past four in the morning. He must have fallen asleep telling stories. He never did have the time to finish his class preparation work.

But did it matter? There had been an earthquake, and judging by the degree of the shake, it was probably a severe one in some nearby places. At least he and his wife and daughter were safe, and he had had his dream of owning two rooms, for however brief a moment.

In any case, it looked like there would not be any school tomorrow—or today. Perhaps the first thing he would have to do was to help the students build outdoor shelters. That could keep him busy for days.

Come to think of it, now Professor Fu could really show off his skill in carpentry. . . .

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AN INTERVIEW WITH DONG LESHAN

INTERVIEWER

Before we get to Professor Fu and his topsy-turvy world, could we ask you some general questions? We understand that China is eager to introduce foreign literature to its citizens and there are a number of translation journals currently in existence. The literature of what country is the most sought-after by readers?

DONG

There are about 30 journals carrying translated material ranging from the Third World's to that of the socialist countries. But American literature is decidedly the most popular. The reason is that after decades of isolation from the outside world, general readers are eager to learn about America through its literature.

INTERVIEWER

Jack London has been the most well-regarded American author in the Soviet Union. Can you name an American author who is London's equivalent in China?

DONG

Theodore Dreiser, with official sanction. But that was only up to the onset of the Cultural Revolution, when American authors could no longer be translated or published. Unofficially, Hemingway was quite popular.

INTERVIEWER

Who is the most popular American author in China today? And what American novel is *the* best seller?

DONG

Herman Wouk and his *The Winds of War* and its sequel *Wars and Remembrance*.

INTERVIEWER

What constitutes a popular work—a best seller, so to speak? Do you measure it by the number of copies sold? How many copies did *The Winds of War* sell?

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DONG

The Winds of War sold 500,000 copies in three printings, and *Wars and Remembrance* sold 280,000 copies. Before that, a reprint of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, a 40-year-old translation, sold 600,000 copies. On the average, an American novel sells between 20,000 and 50,000 copies.

INTERVIEWER

How much does a book generally cost?

DONG

An average book of 200 pages (about 150,000 words) sells for one yuan ($0.50 at current exchange rate). A first printing is usually 20,000 copies, which is the break-even point if all are sold.

INTERVIEWER

How do the Chinese translate the title of a novel? Directly? Or are changes made?

DONG

In the old days, titles were reconstituted to suit Chinese comprehension. Thus, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became *A Tale of Black Slaves Appealing to Heaven for Help*; *Oliver Twist* became *An Orphan in the Foggy Capital*; etc. The tendency now is to translate the title directly.

INTERVIEWER

What are the mechanics of a book getting published, an author getting noticed?

DONG

To get his book published, a writer usually sends his manuscript directly to a publisher or a magazine. There is no such thing as a literary agent in China. Magazine editors discover new talents by looking at unsolicited material which is mailed in. But an unknown writer often finds it difficult to get noticed. The letters column of a literary journal recently published a letter bitterly complaining that editors only accept manuscripts from established authors. Then there is the story of an unsuccessful writer who finally succeeded in seeing his work in print by adding a well-known name to his byline as "co-author."

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INTERVIEWER

How did writers function during the Cultural Revolution? Were they told what and how to write?

DONG

They just stopped writing altogether. One had to be politically in tune with the current trend in order to get published. At the time only a few protégés of Jiang Qing continued to publish, and of course they wrote what she told them to write.

INTERVIEWER

What has been the deepest change in the lot of writers since then?

DONG

The lot of writers has improved a great deal since then. Even those who had been exiled to remote areas since the first Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957 were rehabilitated by 1979 and returned to writing. Writers now are enjoying a certain degree of freedom—not the kind of abandoned freedom manifested in the West: pornography, violence, anything goes; but freedom nevertheless. They are encouraged to expand the scope of their subject-choosing; experiments in new forms of writing style are tolerated. No longer are there *official* regulations and restrictions to limit a writer's creative spirit. He may be criticized and commented on for something he has written, but he is allowed to go on writing and publishing.

INTERVIEWER

In writing Professor Fu's story, how did the idea come to you? Is the story meant to be ironic? Are you being critical?

DONG

The idea came accidentally. I had stopped writing fiction in 1957. Only when the ban against writing about anything but workers, peasants, and soldiers had been lifted, after the fall of the Gang of Four, did I begin to have the urge to write creatively again, about people I knew. Intellectuals had hardly been subjects of short stories and novels except as villains. Once the lifting of the ban had given me the urge to write, the idea clicked very easily. I wanted to show how man could adjust himself to the change of circumstances and survive. Professor

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Fu seeks solace in the fact that he has mastered carpentry although he has lost almost all that is most precious to him: books and music. Mrs. Fu finds excuses to justify her toiling in the fields: she becomes healthier and is able to deliver a baby. Values are relative, I am trying to say. Professor and Mrs. Fu accept fate with wry resignation. And that is what enables them to survive.

INTERVIEWER

Is the story about yourself? How much of it is imaginative?

DONG

All the details in the story except the dream sequence are real. They are derived from my experience and from the experience of people I have known.

INTERVIEWER

How would you write the story today?

DONG

Although Professor Fu has since been given a two-room instead of one-room apartment, he is again dreaming of a larger space since his children have grown. No longer a cast-off, he is now a much sought-after person, his name appearing on the rosters of all kinds of committees. He will be busy attending meetings, making speeches, writing articles to suit special occasions, etc. In the end, he may even be dreaming of the "care-free" days of his topsy-turvy world. . . .

INTERVIEWER

What you are describing is that, indeed, Professor Fu's lot is improving. But my question is how would you write the same story today?

DONG

The writing itself and its critical element would, of course, be much less subtle.

—Interviewed by Timothy Tung

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It's Six A.M. Do You Know Where You Are?

Jay McInerney

You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But you are here, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are a little fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. The club is either the Bimbo Box or the Lizard Lounge. It might all come a little clearer if you could slip into the bathroom and do a little more Bolivian Marching Powder. There is a small voice inside of you insisting that this epidemic lack of clarity is the result of too much of that already, but you are not yet willing to listen to that voice. The night has already turned on that imperceptible pivot where two A.M. changes to six A.M. You know that moment has come and gone, but you are not yet willing to concede that you have crossed the line beyond which all is gratuitous damage and the palsy of unravelled nerve endings. Somewhere back there it was possible to cut your losses, but you rode past that moment on a comet trail of white powder and now you are trying to hang onto that rush. Your brain at this moment is composed of bri-

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gades of tiny Bolivian soldiers. They are tired and muddy from their long march through the night. There are holes in their boots and they are hungry. They need to be fed. They need the Bolivian Marching Powder.

Something vaguely tribal about this scene—pendulous jewelry, face paint, ceremonial headgear and hairstyles. You feel that there is also a certain Latin theme, which is more than the fading buzz of marimbas in your brain.

You are leaning back against a post which may or may not be structural with regard to the building, but which feels essential for the maintenance of an upright position. The bald girl is saying this used to be a good place to come before the assholes discovered it. You do not want to be talking to this bald girl, or even listening to her, which is all you're doing, but you don't have your barge pole handy, and just at the moment you don't want to test the powers of speech or locomotion.

How did you get here? It was your friend, Tad Allagash, who powered you in here, and now he has disappeared. Tad is the kind of guy who certainly would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. He is either your best self or your worst self, you're not sure which. Earlier in the evening it seemed clear that he was your best self. You started on the Upper East Side with champagne and unlimited prospects, strictly observing the Allagash rule of perpetual motion: one drink per stop. Tad's mission in life is to have more fun than anyone else in New York City, and this involves a lot of moving around, since there is always the likelihood that you are missing something, that where you aren't is more fun than where you are. You are awed by this strict refusal to acknowledge any goal higher than the pursuit of pleasure. You want to be like that. You also think that he is shallow and dangerous. His friends are all rich and spoiled, like the cousin from Memphis you met earlier in the evening who would not accompany you below Fourteenth Street because he said he didn't have a lowlife visa. This cousin had a girlfriend with cheekbones to break your heart, and you knew she was the real thing when she absolutely refused to acknowledge your presence. She possessed secrets—about islands, about horses—which you would never know.

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You have traveled from the meticulous to the slime. The girl with the shaved head has a scar tattooed on her scalp. It looks like a long, sutured gash. You tell her it is very realistic. She takes *this* as a compliment and thanks you. You meant as opposed to romantic. "I could use one of those right over my heart," you say.

"You want I can give you the name of the guy did it. You'd be surprised how cheap." You don't tell her that nothing would surprise you now. Her voice, for instance, which is like the New Jersey State Anthem played through an electric shaver.

The bald girl is emblematic of the problem. What the problem is is that for some reason you think you are going to meet the kind of girl who is not the kind of girl who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. When you meet her you are going to tell her that what you really want is a house in the country with a garden. New York, the club scene, bald women—you're tired of all that. Your presence here is only a matter of conducting an experiment in limits, reminding yourself of what you aren't. You see yourself as the kind of guy who wakes up early on Sunday morning and steps out to pick up *The Times* and croissants. You take a cue from the Arts and Leisure section and decide to check out some exhibition—costumes of the Hapsburg Court at the Met, say, or Japanese lacquerware of the Muromachi period at the Asia Society. Maybe you will call that woman you met at the publishing party Friday night, the party you did not get sloppy drunk at, the woman who is an editor at a famous publishing house even though she looks like a fashion model. See if she wants to check out the exhibition and maybe do an early dinner. You will wait until eleven A.M. to call her, because she may not be an early riser, like you. She may have been out a little late, at a nightclub, say. It occurs to you that there is time for a couple of sets of tennis before the museum. You wonder if she plays, but then, of course she would.

When you meet the girl who wouldn't etcetera, you will tell her that you are slumming, visiting your own six A.M. Lower East Side of the soul on a lark, stepping nimbly between the

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piles of garbage to the marimba rhythms in your head.

On the other hand, any beautiful girl, specifically one with a full head of hair, would help you stave off this creeping sense of mortality. You remember the Bolivian Marching Powder and realize you're not down yet. First you have to get rid of this bald girl because she is doing bad things to your mood.

In the bathroom there are no doors on the stalls, which makes it tough to be discreet. But clearly, you are not the only person here to take on fuel. Lots of sniffling going on. The windows in here are blacked over, and for this you are profoundly grateful.

Hup, two. Three, four. The Bolivian soldiers are back on their feet. They are off and running in formation. Some of them are dancing, and you must do the same.

Just outside the door you spot her: tall, dark, and alone, half-hiding behind a pillar at the edge of the dance floor. You approach laterally, moving your stuff like a bad spade through the slalom of a synthesized conga rhythm. She jumps when you touch her shoulder.

"Dance?"

She looks at you as if you had just suggested instrumental rape. "I do not speak English," she says, when you ask again.

"Français?"

She shakes her head. Why is she looking at you that way, like there are tarantulas nesting in your eye sockets?

"You are by any chance from Bolivia? Or Peru?"

She is looking around for help now. Remembering a recent encounter with a young heiress's bodyguard at Danceteria—or was it New Berlin?—you back off, hands raised over your head.

The Bolivian soldiers are still on their feet, but they have stopped singing their marching song. You realize that we are at a crucial juncture with regard to morale. What we need is a good pep talk from Tad Allagash, but he is not to be found. You try to imagine what he would say. *Back on the horse. Now we're* really *going to have some fun.* Something like that. You suddenly realize that he has already slipped out with some rich hose queen. He is back at her place on Fifth Ave., and they are

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doing some of her off-the-boat-quality drugs. They are scooping it out of tall Ming vases and snorting it off of each other's naked bodies. You hate Tad Allagash.

Go home. Cut your losses.

Stay. Go for it.

You are a republic of voices tonight. Unfortunately, the republic is Italy. All these voices are waving their arms and screaming at each other. There's an *ex cathedra* riff coming down from the Vatican: *Repent. There's still time. Your body is the temple of the Lord and you have defiled it.* It is, after all, Sunday morning, and as long as you have any brain cells left there will always be this resonant patriarchal basso echoing down the marble vaults of your churchgoing childhood to remind you that this is the Lord's day. What you need is another overpriced drink to drown it out. But a search of pockets yields only a dollar bill and change. You paid ten to get in here. Panic is gaining on you.

You spot a girl at the edge of the dance floor who looks like your last chance for earthly salvation against the creeping judgment of Sunday morning. You know for a fact that if you go out into the morning alone, without even your sunglasses, which you have forgotten (because who, after all, plans on these travesties), that the harsh, angling light will turn you to flesh and bone. Mortality will pierce you through the retina. But there she is in her pegged pants, a kind of doo-wop retro ponytail pulled off to the side, great lungs, as eligible a candidate as you could hope to find this late in the game. The sexual equivalent of fast food.

She shrugs and nods when you ask her to dance. You like the way she moves, half-tempo, the oiled ellipses of her hips and shoulders. You get a little hip and ass contact. After the second song she says she's tired. She's on the edge of bolting when you ask her if she needs a little pick-me-up.

"You've got some blow?" she says.

"Monster," you say.

She takes your arm and leads you into the Ladies'. There's another guy in the stall beside yours so it's okay. After a couple of spoons she seems to like you just fine and you are feeling very

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likeable yourself. A couple more. This girl is all nose. When she leans forward for the spoon the front of her shirt falls open in a way you can't help noticing. You wonder if this is her way of thanking you.

Oh yes.

"I love drugs," she says, as you march towards the bar.

"It's something we have in common," you say.

"Have you ever noticed how all the good words start with D? D and L."

You try to think about this. You're not quite sure what she's driving at. The Bolivians are singing their marching song but you can't quite make out the words.

"You know? Drugs. Delight. Decadence."

"Debauchery," you say, catching the tune now.

"Dexedrine."

"Delectable. Deranged. Debilitated."

"And L. Lush and luscious."

"Languorous."

"Lazy."

"Libidinous."

"What's that?" she says.

"Horny."

"Oh," she says, and casts a long, arching look over your shoulder. Her eyes glaze in a way that reminds you precisely of the closing of a sandblasted glass shower door. You can see that the game is over, though you're not sure which rule you broke. Possibly she finds "H" words offensive. She is scanning the dance floor for a man with a compatible vocabulary. You have more: *down* and *depressed*; *lost* and *lonely*. It's not that you are really going to miss this girl who thinks that *decadence* and *dexedrine* are the high points of the language of the Kings James and Lear, but the touch of flesh, the sound of another human voice. . . . You know that there is a special purgatory waiting out there for you, a desperate half-sleep which is like a grease fire in the brain pan.

The girl half-waves as she disappears into the crowd. There is no sign of the other girl, the girl who would not be here. There is no sign of Tad Allagash. The Bolivians are mutinous. You

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can't stop the voices.

Here you are again.

All messed up and no place to go.

It is worse even than you expected, stepping out into the morning. The light is like a mother's reproach. The sidewalk sparkles cruelly. Visibility unlimited. The downtown warehouses look serene and rested in this beveled light. A cab passes uptown and you start to wave, then realize you have no money. The cab stops. You jog over and lean in the window.

"I guess I'll walk after all."

"Asshole." He leaves rubber.

You start north, holding your hand over your eyes. There is a bum sleeping on the sidewalk, swathed in garbage bags. He lifts his head as you pass. "God bless you and forgive your sins," he says. You wait for the cadge, but that's all he says. You wish he hadn't said it.

As you turn away, what is left of your olfactory equipment sends a message to your brain. The smell of fresh bread. Somewhere they are baking bread. You see bakery trucks loading in front of a loft building on the next block. You watch as bags of rolls are carried out onto the loading dock by a man with a tattooed forearm. This man is already at work, so that regular people will have fresh bread for their morning tables. The righteous people who sleep at night and eat eggs for breakfast. It is Sunday morning and you have not eaten since. . . when? Friday night. As you approach, the smell of the bread washes over you like a gentle rain. You inhale deeply, filling your lungs with it. Tears come to your eyes, and you are filled with such a rush of tenderness and pity that you stop beside a lamppost and hang on for support.

You remember another Sunday morning in your old apartment on Cornelia Street when you woke to the smell of bread from the bakery downstairs. There was the smell of bread every morning, but this is the one you remember. You turned to see your wife sleeping beside you. Her mouth was open and her hair fell down across the pillow to your shoulder. The tanned skin of her shoulder was the color of bread fresh from the oven.

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Slowly, and with a growing sense of exhilaration, you remembered who you were. You were the boy and she was the girl, your college sweetheart. You weren't famous yet, but you had the rent covered, you had your favorite restaurant where the waitresses knew your name and you could bring your own bottle of wine. It all seemed to be just the way you had pictured it when you had discussed plans for marriage and New York. The apartment with the pressed tin ceiling, the claw-footed bath, the windows that didn't quite fit the frame. It seemed almost as if you had wished for that very place. You leaned against your wife's shoulder. Later you would get up quietly, taking care not to wake her, and go downstairs for croissants and the *Sunday Times*, but for a long time you lay there breathing in the mingled scents of bread, hair and skin. You were in no hurry to get up. You knew it was a moment you wanted to savor. You didn't know how soon it would be over, that within a year she would go back to Michigan to file for divorce.

You approach the man on the loading dock. He stops working and watches you. You feel that there is something wrong with the way your legs are moving.

"Bread." This is what you say to him. You meant to say something more, but this is as much as you can get out.

"What was your first clue?" he says. He is a man who has served his country, you think, a man with a family somewhere outside the city. Small children. Pets. A garden.

"Could I have some? A roll or something?"

"Get out of here."

The man is about your size, except for the belly, which you don't have. "I'll trade you my jacket," you say. It is one hundred percent raw silk from Paul Stuart. You take it off, show him the label.

"You're crazy," the man says. Then he looks back into the warehouse. He picks up a bag of hard rolls and throws them at your feet. You hand him the jacket. He checks the label, sniffs the jacket, then tries it on.

You tear the bag open and the smell of warm dough rushes over you. The first bite sticks in your throat and you almost gag. You will have to go slowly. You will have to learn everything all over again.

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Portfolio

Midnight Draft

Sandro Chia

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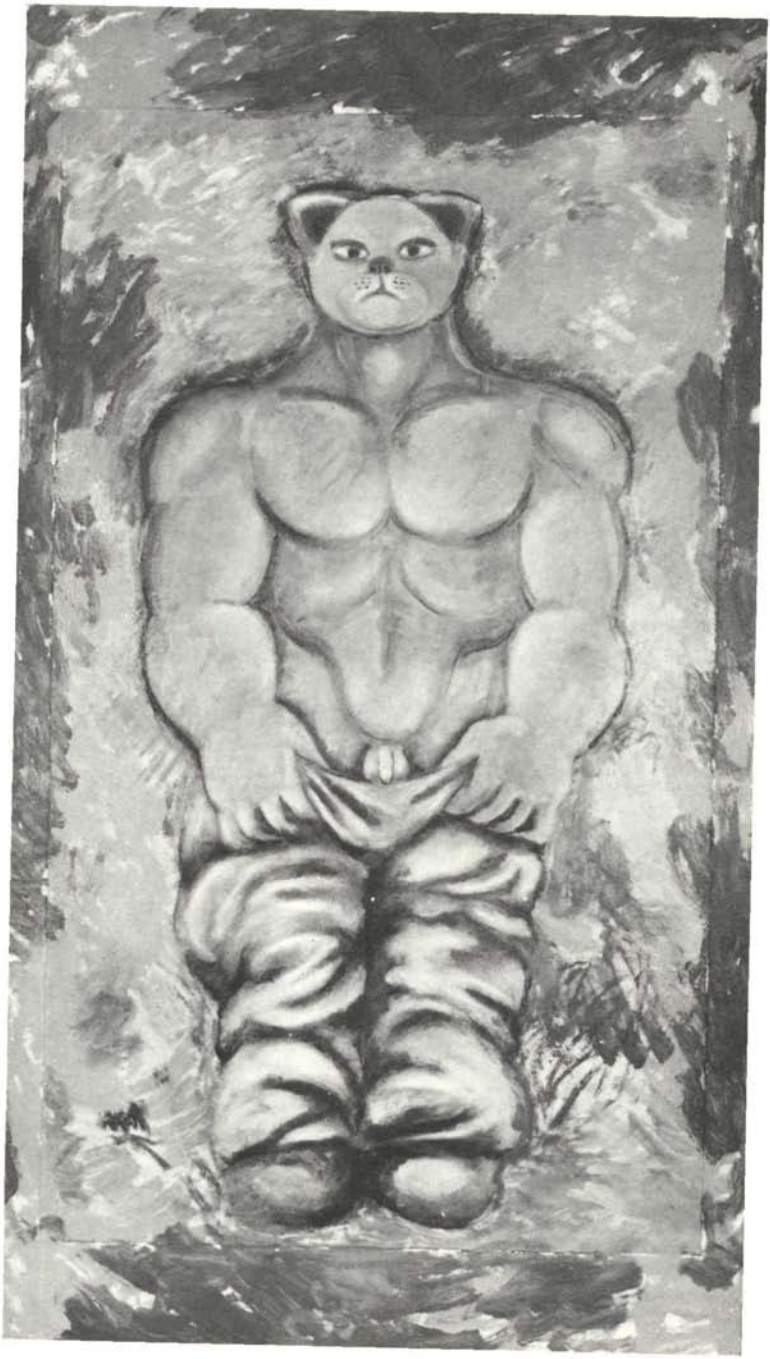

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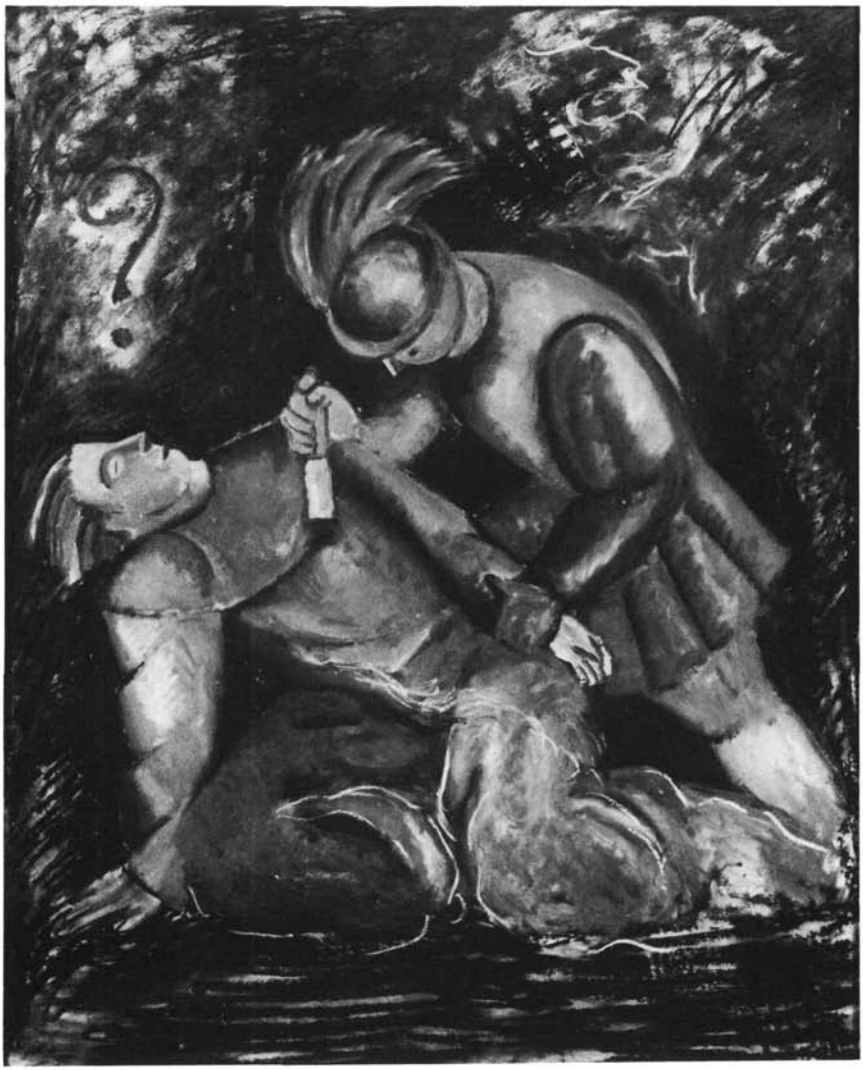

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Pearls

Michael Cunningham

Angela. I love what you left behind. Your scent, melony, yet sharp and immaculate as yogurt. Your diaphragm, placed, according to the promise, in my nightstand drawer as a token of fidelity. And the pearls. The pearls.

I started finding them this evening, just after I got home. I'd expected a note. To be frank, I'd expected a present. You are such a maniac for gifts. So I entered the apartment in double-edged anticipation: dreading your absence, but looking forward to the surprise you'd planned, the particular way you had chosen to make yourself remembered. Of course, I found nothing at first, and read it symbolically. Leaving no remembrances was a way of saying "forget me." I felt greedy, and abashed. If I didn't deserve nothing you wouldn't have left me nothing, right? Stomach creeping, I went to the bathroom to wash my face. And there found the first pearl.

It lay in the basin, such a match for the white enamel that it looked like part of the fixture. I picked it up and rolled it

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between my thumb and finger. Recognized it: one of the cheap imitations from that ultralong strand of yours, those impossibly opalescent pellets that reached, unwound, from your neck to your ankles. The sight of it made my blood jump. It carried such an image of you, naked, belted at the waist by pearls which bit lightly into your flesh, emphasizing its softness and its resiliency. I saw no design behind a pearl in my sink, was sufficiently slow-witted to chalk it up to accident. How does one accidently lose a single pearl? I scrubbed my face and went to the kitchen to mix a drink.

The second pearl lay in the tumbler I took from the cabinet. Immediately, I saw your mind, ticking off my particular traffic patterns, and your hand, paint-smeared and raw, holding a pearl. My apartment was full of pearls. Beautiful. You are simple and wily as a geisha.

As of bedtime, I have found seventy-three of them. At the outset, I giddily ransacked the place like a kid hunting Easter eggs, snatching up all the easy ones. The ones in kitchen cabinets, all the prizes in wine goblets and coffee cups, and then those from the living room: a pearl in each plant, pearls in the bookshelves, a row of pearls balanced on the molding over the door. Did you intend that as an arch for me to pass unwittingly under? Of course you did. You intend everything you do.

I uncovered a few of the trickier ones, those behind paintings and the ones in light fixtures. Then I decided to knock off. I wanted to draw out the process, to know for another day or two that vestiges of you remained hidden around me. The pearls I did find I heaped in the center of the bed: gleaming there, they looked unutterably womanish. Are pearls considered emblems for the clitoris? I ask, because I suspect you'd know.

I went to bed early, in your honor, and, washing myself, found three more: one in the bathtub faucet (very clever), one in the soap dish, and the one that dolloped out of my toothpaste tube (how did you ever get it in there?). This brings the total to seventy-six. I must be nearing the end of the strand.

My thoughts and devotions to you, sweetheart. Is it as damp and wind-bitten as we imagined? Don't worry. Six months isn't long. Meanwhile, I wait for you, here in my pearl-studded flat.

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Morning. I found a couple more right off, in the pockets of my robe. And the one in the coffee. That one presented itself in an especially lovely way. I had scooped the grounds into a filter, and poured water through, then found a pearl, lodged among the scum like a treasure left by the tide on a dirty beach. Beautiful. I'm afraid the one in the toaster was not quite such a good idea. It melted, and released some kind of smoke I suspect may have been poisonous. At first I thought it was the toast burning, and extracted it, to find another pearl, heated to a teardrop, clinging to the crust. You can't imagine the smell. Do you suppose they use gasoline somehow in the production of synthetic pearls?

At any rate, I am stirred and delighted. Have you found the present I hid in your suitcase? It was the warmest I could find. The clerk said nothing is as warm as Irish wool. And to me, even the name "Yale" sounds cold. If I were assigned that word in charades, I would opt for "sounds like," and pantomime a gale: neck-snapping wind, snow blown into needles. I hated giving you up to that, that cold breathy "Y" and that long "a," slippery as ice. Remember that it will be good for your painting. I considered calling you this morning, but decided to honor our pact. Instead I sat in the apartment, in the robe you gave me, and practiced sending scenic telepagrams: you and I together, several years from now, on an island off Canada, a luminous place imbued with that pale gray northern light, sharing kitchen and bedroom but maintaining separate studios, where our paintings prosper like crops. Did you receive the image? After trying to send that, I must admit that I worked on a few private ones, things not suited to cross-country transmissions. Those hips and thighs of yours. That dense overripe jungle. Your bigness makes me swell. I love you more for not being pretty, for the gaunt determination of your face and the grimness of your mouth. You are cold and luscious as the moon. Your images engaged me so that I was late getting off for class, ran out of the apartment unshaven, with a pearl in each jacket pocket and, as I realized halfway down the stairs, too late to do anything about it, a pearl in my left shoe.

My classes shlumped along as usual. How is it possible for

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undergraduates to produce such rigid, unfeeling lines? They are not unfeeling people. But I couldn't draw anything so dead if I tried. There's not a half-dozen like you per generation. Your sense of volume, those delicate, bottomless grays. And you always know just where to cut. My favorite is still the velvety little mouse-colored painting, slashed across by that seething comet's tail of green. I'd associated limpid green with hospital corridors. Only you could have given that color teeth.

Don't lose your bite, angel. Watch out for the enemy: the infernal Five Sections. Five sections of drawing and mixed media, undergraduate division, can dull you like a diet of oily, overcooked food. If you hadn't turned up at this cow college, and made my life opalescent, I might be dead by now of indigestion.

I dodged a departmental meeting (subject: the strain exerted on our limited budget by the indiscriminate use of paper clips, when staples are just as effective at a fraction of the cost), to get home and find some more pearls. In an hour, I located two dozen of them. If painting doesn't pan out for you, you might be able to work this new-found ability into some sort of career. Who but a genius would have thought to conceal pearls not only among the slats of a venetian blind but in the pleats of the curtain as well, to produce a double, clattering rain. They fell, as designed, at my feet.

It is now late evening, and you haven't broken the pact. To be quite frank, I'm a little surprised. I'd expected a phone call by now, promise or none. You are so blamed strong.

By the way, those pearls in the shower drain have clogged things up terribly. I can't see them, of course, but know they must be there, because when I try to use the shower, my rinse water starts burbling back up at me, faithful as bad luck. The drain worked fine before you left. I've got the plumber coming a week from Tuesday, which is the soonest he could make it. Plumbers do a better business these days than most painters.

I tried to do some painting after dinner, but it wouldn't go. Paint still keeps flattening out on me. My colors turn murky, and I can't put the depth into them. That's never happened to you, has it? The world in your eyes has always been a place deep and frightening as your own body, eminently worth painting.

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That's why Yale wanted you so. To be honest, I envy you your newness. To be excruciatingly honest, I envy you your talent. I am proud to have been a teacher of yours. Note the phraseology there: I could just as easily have called myself "your teacher," as in *proud to have been your teacher*, and ridden the implication that I was the only one. But I know there have been others.

Including the pearl in the toaster, I have now got a hundred and twenty-three of them. Laid end to end, they would surely reach, in a dotted line, from my bed clear out the front door. Eleven o'clock my time, and you still haven't called. I've thought of doing it myself, but damn if I'm going to break the pact. I'm the one who's got to stay in Oklahoma, teaching the unteachable. I'm the one whose pinks aspire to be clean and shocking as a gash cut in the side of a living salmon, and whose pinks keep turning out unsurprising as mud. Damn if I'll break the pact and call.

Morning number two. I slept in my clothes, with the pearls beside me. A dragon guarding treasure. I am just a bit of a dragon, aren't I? I'm not pretty, and I'm not quite what anyone would call young anymore. I'm no twenty-two-year-old whiz cutting the wind in New Haven, that's for sure. I make breakfast, and find no pearls. That sounds like a line you might use in describing a stymied housewife, doesn't it? The opening to her story: *Betty Barnett cooked oyster stew for her family every Friday for thirty years, and never once found a pearl.* I brew empty coffee, toast bread.

All my pockets have been picked clean. I shouldn't have been so greedy. I should never have agreed to your lunatic pact. Why no phone calls? Why an embargo on letters? You do insist on your tests, don't you? Been in school too long, you want my honest opinion. Geography may not buckle under testing, but people do. So in four months' time, we find out whether our ideas of one another are strong enough to withstand separation. The knowledge could be useful someday, I'll admit. Meantime, I have your diaphragm, one hundred and twenty-three of your pearls, and my own five daily sections. Today I teach them savagely, yelling at every student for failing to draw

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the way you do. You're going to put this penny-ante college on the map, you know that? *No*, shrieks the art instructor. *Fill the page just this way. Run the figure slightly off, dip her foot into space the paper doesn't occupy.* Do it the Angela Feinstein way. Thus the Angela Feinstein school is established, unbeknownst to its students.

Tonight, I call. You are not in. I know it is unbalanced, but can't stop the thought: you are with somebody. A high-blown Yale painter, whose pinks are legend. Who invites you up to his place, to look at his pinks. Diaphragms are available in any drugstore. Aren't they? I know so little of women's mechanics. I don't even know where you get a diaphragm.

I eat a bowl of Grapenuts for dinner, and you know what comes tumbling out of the box along with the cereal. Do you know what I do with it? Swallow it like a pill. I go directly to my studio and begin painting, as though I expected the drug to have an effect. Nothing unusual moves my hand.

A day, a night, another day. I have called you three more times, and am afraid of calling again. Afraid of finding you in, and afraid of not finding you. More pearls have surfaced: inside the receiver of my telephone, tucked into underwear I haven't worn in years, taped to the bottom of the drawer in which I keep my journal. Is there anything of mine you haven't touched? I put the pearls together on the floor, arranged them in an oval, and they made a necklace of impossible length. You went out and bought extras, didn't you? Now I've got them all. I have checked the apartment as thoroughly as I would if I were a spy, searching for hidden microphones. Found things I didn't know I had. But now you are contained. I have made a full assessment of your leavings. I can fit them into a shoebox, and close the lid.

Next morning. You've got me. You are too smart for me. I didn't check the ice, did I? It couldn't have been better choreographed. As you probably know, from the radio signals these pearls undoubtedly send off the moment they reach unfettered air, I had a girl up last night. A girl, not a woman. One of my

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undergraduates, who is a damn sight more graceful than her name. Her name is Tilly. I had Tilly over because I thought I might expire from loneliness and rancor, and because you haven't answered your phone four times running. The seduction I staged was a masterpiece of self-mortification: Vivaldi on the stereo, hearty slaps of cologne on my jowls and belly. And worse than that: my whole life's story, with appropriate deletions. I must have talked at Tilly for an hour and a half. I was out of control. Tilly, bless her, listened all the way, sipping delicately at the club soda she'd requested in lieu of the wine offered by her exploiter. Said exploiter drank generously of said wine. And kept talking.

I had reached a particularly awkward stretch in my story, the complicated part about my own unwillingness to quit Oklahoma, and the subsequent battle it engendered between you and me (your accusations of chicken-heartedness, my own fear of failure, my fear of success); Tilly concentrated, or feigned concentration, with her glass of soda held close to her face, the rim pressed thoughtfully against her cheek. I told her I was terrified of every painter more acclaimed than I. I demonstrated what that sort of terror can do with the painting process: made an explosion in the air with my hands. And at that moment, the ice in Tilly's soda had melted sufficiently to release you-know-what. It floated lazily to the top, among limpid bubbles. Tilly didn't notice it. She thought I was staring, benumbed, at her face.

Do I need to tell you that I felt like something from Edgar Allen Poe? That you might just as well have risen up out of that glass yourself, hovered like smoke over Tilly's left shoulder, and mouthed the words "chicken-heart" at me while Tilly sipped blissfully away? Of course, I sent her home. Of course, she was offended. And, for the next three months, I will face her wounded eyes and tensed shoulders every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at one-thirty.

What do you want from me? I can't abide the fact that, somewhere in my apartment, there've got to be more pearls. You must have dropped them into the heating vents, the bowels of the air conditioner; I'm sure they watch me as I sleep.

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I didn't know when we took each other on that something like this could happen. That I could feel so invaded, and so isolated. Today I wrap your diaphragm in brown paper and mail it to you. Your basic symbolic communication. Men and women deprived of telephone contact must, in this late age, resort to pictograms. I wait ardently for your reply.

And it arrives, eight days later. Ten feet of jeweler's string. Just what do you mean by this? When I saw the envelope, I thought you had broken down and written. But no, all it contained was the string. I'm supposed to make a strand for you, eh? Keep your pearls in order? Guard the flame? Thanks, but no. I acknowledge the fact that I have flunked the test. I do not have your kind of stuff. I require comforts. Letters, phone calls. Quiet mornings and evenings, earned dinners, manageable work. I reserve the right to find solace in a new pair of shoes.

And I am a fearful man. I dread the blinding light, the hunger for pain I see in you people who disappear into paint. So spare me, please. When you come back, if you come back, do not telephone, and do not stop by. I've been thinking of switching apartments, to stop myself from sleepwalking, groping for pearls.

Classes, meetings, classes again. My days measure themselves off into orderly segments. I am benign in the classroom, paternal; the students think I am responding to their growth, and like me better. Even Tilly has relaxed her shoulders inching downward, as I frown over her work, absorbed in it, suggesting hair-line changes. She really is quite lovely, cool and golden-limbed. And she has begun settling into the notion that I, as an artist, am entitled to fits of rudeness, lapses of taste. In a week or more, I can probably ask her out again.

I have been wearing the jeweler's string wound around my ankle, so tightly that it interferes with the flow of blood. My left foot is usually numb and tingling. If I'm beginning to walk with a limp, though, no one around here has mentioned it yet.

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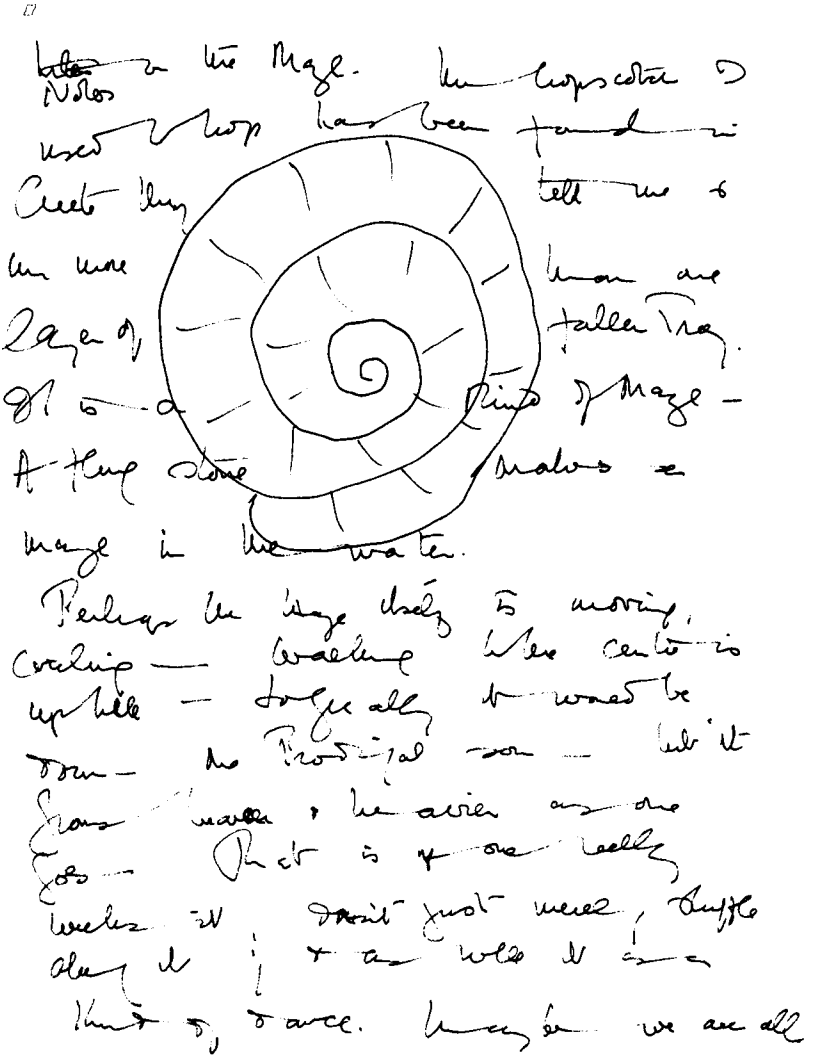

A manuscript page from P.L. Travers' article "Walking the Maze at Chartres" due to appear in the next issue of Parabola.

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The Art of Fiction LXXIII

P.L. Travers

Pamela Lyndon Travers was born in Queensland in 1906 of Irish stock. From the age of sixteen she worked as a journalist, dancer, actress and writer of stories and poems. She contributed to "AE" 's (George Russell) The Irish Statesman. *While convalescing from an illness in a Sussex cottage she wrote* Mary Poppins *in order to amuse herself. Eventually, on the advice of a friend, it was published in 1934. P.L. Travers followed the success of the book with* Mary Poppins Comes Back *(1935),* Mary Poppins Opens the Door *(1944),* Mary Poppins in the Park *(1952), and now* Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane *(1982). Her other works include* I Go By Sea, I Go By Land *(1944),* The Fox at the Manger *(1962),* Friend Monkey *(1971),* About the Sleeping Beauty *(1975), and three books based on preceding "Mary Poppins" stories,* Mary Poppins From A to Z

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(1962), A Mary Poppins Story for Colouring *(1969) and* Mary Poppins in the Kitchen *(1975). She has published several articles on mythology, children's literature, and her own work, the most important being "Only Connect" (1967), her address to the Library of Congress.*

P.L. Travers is based in London, although she has held appointments as writer-in-residence at various American colleges. Her terraced house in Chelsea has a pink door, the color of the cover of Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane. *In the hall is an antique rocking horse. Her study is at the top of the house: a white-walled room, crowded with books and papers, its austerity relieved by a modern rocking chair. Pamela Travers, tall and handsome, with short whitish hair, is a strong woman of great humour and charm. Once a dancer, she moves smoothly and gracefully; once an actress, she speaks with the deep clear tones of another era. Before answering a question she sometimes closes her eyes as if in meditation. There is something both mythic and modern about her. She was wearing a blue and white flowing dress and white pumps and silver ethnic jewelry. As she spoke, her tongue sometimes darted from the corner of her mouth, reminding one perhaps of the hamadryad in* Mary Poppins*—the wise snake that lectures to the transfixed Banks children. She is a master of pith and anecdote, as shown in the story she tells about Yeats. A young woman then, traveling by train in Ireland, it occurred to her to stop and bring a gift to the poet. She persuaded a boatman to take her to the Isle of Innisfree, where she collected great branches of rowan for her gift. A storm came up as she struggled with her branches into the train car. Finally, at Yeats' door in Dublin, a startled maid took her in and dried her clothes by the fire. By this time, Travers, quite embarrassed, was planning an opportune escape, but as she made for the door the servant told her that Yeats was ready to see her. She ascended the stairs to meet a grandfatherly Yeats who proudly showed her an egg his canary had just laid. As they talked, Travers noticed on his desk a vase with a small slip from the colossus of branches she had brought. "That's when I learned," Travers concludes, "that you can say more with less."*

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INTERVIEWERS

That recalls your meeting with AE (George Russell). You must have had great courage as a young woman to call on these venerable Irishmen.

TRAVERS

I read AE's poems when I was a child in Australia. Later I came to England to see my relatives. But before I did that, I sent a poem to AE who was then editing *The Irish Statesman*, and with all the arrogance of youth I didn't put any letter with it explaining myself or saying that I was Irish or anything. I just sent it with a stamped addressed envelope.

And sure enough, the stamped envelope came back. But in it was a check for two guineas and a letter that said: "I'm accepting your poem, which is a very good one, and I think it could not have been written by anyone who wasn't Irish. If you're ever coming to Ireland, be sure to come and see me." Since I was going to Ireland, I did go to see him and was greatly welcomed and more poems were taken. I felt immediate mutuality with him, this great elderly man bothering about me. But he bothered about all young poets. They were always welcome.

After our visit he said to me, "On your way back through Dublin you come and see me again." I said, "Of course, I will." But when the time arrived and I was back in Dublin, an awful timidity came upon me. I thought he was a great man and I shouldn't take up his time; he was doing this for *politesse*. And so I refrained from going to see him and went back to England. Some time later when I opened the door, there was AE. He said to me, "You're a faithless girl. You promised to see me on your way back through Dublin and you didn't." And he added, "I meant to give you my books then and, as you weren't there, I brought them." And there were all his books.

INTERVIEWERS

He sought you out, then?

TRAVERS

Oh, he didn't come to London specially to see me. He had come to see his old friend George Moore. But he took me in

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during that time, and had time for me. I often went out to Dublin after that and saw a good deal of AE and Yeats and James Stephens. Among the young people like myself was Frank O'Connor who used to be called Michael O'Donovan. He was one of AE's protégés. There were many of them.

INTERVIEWERS

AE's reaction to *Mary Poppins* is very interesting. You report his saying, "Had [Mary Poppins] lived in another age, in the old times to which she certainly belongs, she would undoubtedly have had long golden tresses, a wreath of flowers in one hand, and perhaps a spear in the other. Her eyes would have been like the sea, her nose comely, and on her feet winged sandals. But, this age being the Kali Yuga, as the Hindus call it, she comes in habiliments suited to it." It seems that AE was suggesting that your English nanny was some twentieth-century version of the Mother Goddess Kali.

TRAVERS

Indeed, he was throwing me a clue, but I didn't seize upon that for a long time. I've always been interested in the Mother Goddess. Not long ago, a young person, whom I don't know very well, sent a message to a mutual friend that said: "I'm an addict of *Mary Poppins*, and I want you to ask P.L. Travers if Mary Poppins is not really the Mother Goddess." So, I sent back a message: "Well, I've only recently come to see that. She is either Mother Goddess or one of her creatures—that is, if we're going to look for mythological or fairy tale origins of *Mary Poppins*."

I've spent years thinking about it because the questions I've been asked, very perceptive questions by readers, have led me to examine what I wrote. The book was entirely spontaneous and not invented, not thought out. I never said, "Well, I'll write a story about Mother Goddess and call it *Mary Poppins*." It didn't happen like that. I cannot summon up inspiration; I myself am summoned.

Once when I was in the United States I went to see a psychologist. It was during the war when I was feeling very cut off. I thought, well, these people in psychology always want to

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see the kinds of things you've done, so I took as many of my books as were then written. I went and met the man, and he gave me another appointment. And at the next appointment the books were handed back to me with the words: "You know, you don't really need me. All you need to do is read your own books."

That was so interesting to me. I began to see, thinking about it, that people who write spontaneously as I do, not with invention, never really read their own books to learn from them. And I set myself to reading them. Every now and then I found myself saying, "But this is true. How did she know?" And then I realized that she is me. Now I can say much more about *Mary Poppins* because what was known to me in my blood and instincts has now come up to the surface in my head.

INTERVIEWERS

Has Mary Poppins changed for you over the years?

TRAVERS

Not at all, not at all.

INTERVIEWERS

Has she changed for other people, do you think? Has their attitude to her altered at all?

TRAVERS

I don't think that she *must* change for other people very much; I think that they would be bitterly disappointed. The other day two little boys accosted me in the street and said to me, "You are the lady who wrote *Mary Poppins*, aren't you?" And I admitted it, and said, "How do you know?" And they said, "Because we sing in the choir, and the vicar told us." So, clearly, they had thrown off their surplices and rushed after me to catch me. So I said, "Well, do you like her?" And they both nodded vigorously. I then said, "What is it you like about her?" And one of them said, "Well, she's so *ordinary* and then..." and having said "and then" he looked around for the proper word, and couldn't find it. And I said, "You don't have to say any more. That 'and then' says everything." And the other little boy said, "Yes, and I'm going to marry her

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when I grow up." And I saw the first one clench his fists and look very belligerent. I felt there might be trouble and so I said, "Well, we'll just have to see what *she* thinks about it, won't we? And in the meantime, my house is just there—come in and have a lemonade." So they did. With regard to your question about her altering, I do not think that people who read her would want her to be altered. And what I liked so much about that—I felt it was the highest praise—was that the boy should say, "Well, she's so *ordinary*." But that's what she is. And it is only through the ordinary that the extraordinary can make itself perceived.

INTERVIEWERS

Speaking about children's reactions, when a little girl was asked why she liked Mary Poppins, she said, "Because she is so *mad*."

TRAVERS

She *is* mad. Only the mad can be so sane. A young man in my house—he's now grown up and has his own children—but when he was sixteen he said to me, "Make me a promise." And I thought, well, an open-ended promise is very difficult and dangerous. . . but he said, "Don't worry, you can easily afford it." (Of course he might have been about to ask me for a Rolls Royce, and what would I have done then?) But I said, "Yes very well." So he said, "Promise me never to be clever." "Oh," I said, "I can easily do that, because you know I'm a perfect fool and I'm not in the least bit clever. But why do you ask that?" He said "I've just been reading *Mary Poppins* again, and it could only have been written by a lunatic." That goes with your girl, you see. And I knew perfectly well, because we understand each other's language very well, that he meant "lunatic" as high praise.

INTERVIEWERS

Virginia Woolf when going through a "mad" period thought she heard the birds singing in Greek. This reminds one of the babies in *Mary Poppins* and *Mary Poppins Comes Back* who understand what the Starling says. Maybe it's the same kind of "madness"?

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TRAVERS

Possibly. My Starlings in *Mary Poppins* talk Cockney, as far as I remember.

INTERVIEWERS

Mary Poppins is always teaching, isn't she?

TRAVERS

Well, yes, but I think she teaches by the way; I don't think she sets herself up as a governess. You remember there was a governess called Miss Andrew. She's very different from that.

INTERVIEWERS

Miss Andrew's a horror. But is Mary Poppins perhaps instructing the children in the "difficult truths" you mention in "Only Connect" as being contained in fairy tale, myth and nursery rhyme?

TRAVERS

Exactly. Well, you see, I think if she comes from anywhere that has a name, it is out of myth. And myth has been my study and joy every since—oh, the age, I would think. . . of three. I've studied it all my life. No culture can satisfactorily move along its forward course without its myths, which are its teachings, its fundamental dealing with the truth of things, and the one reality that underlies everything. Yes, in that way you could say that it was teaching, but in no way deliberately doing so.

INTERVIEWERS

Jane and Michael, then, learn about tears and suffering from Mary Poppins when she leaves them?

TRAVERS

She doesn't hold back anything from them. When they beg her not to depart, she reminds them that nothing lasts forever. She's as truthful as the nursery rhymes. Remember that all the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again. There's such a tremendous truth in that. It goes into children in some part of them that they don't

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know, and indeed perhaps *we* don't know. But eventually they realize—and that's the great truth.

INTERVIEWERS

Does Mary Poppins' teaching—if one can call it that—resemble that of Christ in his parables?

TRAVERS

My Zen master, because I've studied Zen for a long time, told me that every one (and all the stories weren't written then) of the Mary Poppins stories is in essence a Zen story. And someone else, who is a bit of a Don Juan, told me that every one of the stories is a moment of tremendous sexual passion, because it begins with such tension and then it is reconciled and resolved in a way that is gloriously sensual.

INTERVIEWERS

So people can read anything and everything into the stories?

TRAVERS

Indeed. A great friend of mine at the beginning of our friendship (he was himself a poet) said to me very defiantly, "I have to tell you that I *loathe* children's books." And I said to him, "Well, won't you just read this just for my sake?" And he said grumpily, "Oh, very well, send it to me." I did, and I got a letter back saying: "Why didn't you *tell* me? Mary Poppins with her cool green core of sex has me enthralled forever."

INTERVIEWERS

And what about love? Are you implying in the Mary Poppins books that a child needs more than the love of family and friends?

TRAVERS

I have always thought that if the child doesn't need it, it benefits by having that extra, that plus. Every child needs to have for itself not only its loving parents and siblings and friends of its own age, but a grown-up friend. It is the fashion now to make a gap between child and grown-up, but this, I believe, has been made by the media. I was older than Jane and

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Michael, but I had a grown-up friend when I was about eleven. How wonderful it was to be able to have somebody other than your parents that you could talk to, who treated you as though you were a human being, with your own proper place in the world. Your parents did so too (my parents were most loving, I had a most loving childhood), but the extra friend was a tremendous plus.

INTERVIEWERS

That is the kind of love that both Mary Poppins and Friend Monkey give?

TRAVERS

Yes, there is a great deal in common between Mary Poppins and Friend Monkey. *Friend Monkey* is really my favorite of all my books because the Hindu myth on which it is based is my favorite—the myth of the Monkey Lord who loved so much that he created chaos wherever he went.

INTERVIEWERS

Almost a Christ figure?

TRAVERS

Indeed, I hadn't dared to think of that, but yes, indeed, when you read the *Ramayana* you'll come across the story of Hanuman on which I built my version of that very old myth.

I love *Friend Monkey*. I love the story of Hanuman. For many years, it remained in my very blood because he's someone who loves too much and can't help it. I don't know where I first heard of him, but the story remained with me and I knew it would come out of me somehow or other. But I didn't know what shape it would take.

The book hasn't been very well received. It wasn't given very good notices. Everybody said, "Oh, *Friend Monkey*. She's writing about a monkey now. Why not more of Mary Poppins?" I wanted to do something new and, strangely enough, it wasn't something so very new after all.

INTERVIEWERS

Let's talk about another reaction to *Mary Poppins*. As you

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know, the book was recently removed from the children's shelves of the San Francisco libraries. The charge has been made that the book is racist and presents an unflattering view of minorities.

TRAVERS

The Irish have an expression: "Ah, my grief!" It means "the pity of things." The objections had been made to the chapter "Bad Tuesday" where Mary Poppins goes to the four points of the compass. She meets a mandarin in the East, an Indian in the West, an Eskimo in the North, and blacks in the South who speak in a picaninny language. What I find strange is that, while my critics claim to have children's best interests in mind, children themselves have never objected to the book. In fact, they love it. That was certainly the case when I was asked to speak to an affectionate crowd of children at a library in Port-of-Spain in Trinidad. On another occasion, when a white teacher friend of mine explained how she felt uncomfortable reading the picaninny dialect to her young students, I asked her, "And are the black children affronted?" "Not at all," she replied, "it appeared they loved it." "Minorities" is not a word in my vocabulary. And I wonder, sometimes, how much disservice is done children by some individuals who occasionally offer, with good intentions, to serve as their spokesmen. Nonetheless, I have rewritten the offending chapter, and in the revised edition I have substituted a Panda, Dolphin, Polar Bear, and Macaw. I have done so not as an apology for anything I have written. The reason is much more simple: I do not wish to see Mary Poppins tucked away in a closet. Aside from this issue, there is something else you should remember. I never wrote my books especially for children.

INTERVIEWERS

You have said that before. What do you mean?

TRAVERS

When I sat down to write *Mary Poppins* or any of the other books, I did not know children would read them. I'm sure there must be a field of "children's literature"—I hear about it so often—but sometimes I wonder if it isn't a label created by

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publishers and booksellers who also have the impossible presumption to put on books such notes as "from five to seven" or "from nine to twelve." How can they know when a book will appeal to such and such an age?

If you look at other so-called children's authors, you'll see they never wrote directly for children. Though Lewis Carroll dedicated his book to Alice, I feel it was an afterthought once the whole was already committed to paper. Beatrix Potter declared, "I write to please myself!" And I think the same can be said of Milne or Tolkien or Laura Ingalls Wilder.

I certainly had no specific child in mind when I wrote *Mary Poppins*. How could I? If I were writing for the Japanese child who reads it in a land without staircases, how could I have written of a nanny that slides up the bannister? If I were writing for the African child who reads the book in Swahili, how could I have written of umbrellas for a child who has never seen or used one?

But I suppose if there is something in my books that appeals to children, it is the result of my not having to go *back* to my childhood; I can, as it were, turn *aside* and consult it (James Joyce once wrote, "My childhood bends beside me"). If we're completely honest, not sentimental or nostalgic, we have no idea where childhood ends and maturity begins. It is one unending thread, not a life chopped up into sections out of touch with one another.

Once, when Maurice Sendak was being interviewed on television a little after the success of *Where the Wild Things Are*, he was asked the usual questions: Do you have children? Do you like children? After a pause, he said with simple dignity: "I was a child." That says it all.

But don't let me leave you with the impression that I am ungrateful to children. They have stolen much of the world's treasure and magic in the literature they have appropriated for themselves. Think, for example, of the myths or Grimm's fairy tales—none of which were written especially for them—this ancestral literature handed down by the folk. And so despite publishers' labels and my own protestations about not writing especially for them, I am grateful that children have included

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my books in their treasure trove.

INTERVIEWERS

Don't you have a new Mary Poppins book coming out?

TRAVERS

You know, for the longest time I thought I was done with Mary Poppins. Then I found out she was not done with me. My English publisher, William Collins, will release *Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane*. It will be out in the U.S. in the fall of 1982 with Delacorte/Dell. After all those years, Mary Poppins showed me new dimensions of herself and other characters. I will be interested to learn how you and other readers find it. Then in the fall, my English publisher will reissue *Friend Monkey*.

INTERVIEWERS

Could you write a *Mary Poppins* book to order?

TRAVERS

No, never. As I have said, I am summoned. I do not wait around though; I write on other things. For example, I am a regular contributor to the periodical *Parabola: Myth and the Quest for Meaning*, my latest piece being "Leda's Lament." Anyway, everything comes out of living with an idea. If I knew how to summon up inspiration, would I give my secret away?

INTERVIEWERS

Even if you might be termed an "inspired" or mystical writer, do you have to set yourself a daily schedule of writing?

TRAVERS

In a way I'm never not doing it. When I'm going to buy, let us say, a tube of toothpaste, I have it in me. The story or lecture or article is moving. And I make a point of writing, if only a little, every day, as a kind of discipline so that it is not a whim but a piece of work.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you read much before or during writing?

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TRAVERS

No. I read myth and fairy tale and books about them a great deal now, but I very seldom read novels. I find modern novels bore me. I can read Tolstoy and the Russians but mostly I read comparative mythology and comparative religion. I need matter to carry with me.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you compose in longhand or at the typewriter?

TRAVERS

I do a little bit of both. It's very strange. My handwriting, when I'm writing on paper before I put it onto the typewriter, is quite different—it's somebody else's handwriting. I'm always surprised to see it. Perhaps I'm not writing at all; perhaps there is somebody else doing it. I so often wonder: do these ideas come into the mind or are they just instinctive or are they. . . ?

INTERVIEWERS

"Throngs of living souls," as AE suggests.

TRAVERS

I just don't know. I don't think I'm a very mental person. When I write it's more a process of listening. I don't pretend that there is some spirit standing beside me that tells me things. More and more I've become convinced that the great treasure to possess is the Unknown. I'm going to write, I hope, a lot about that. It's with my unknowing that I come to the myths. If I came to them knowing, I would have nothing to learn. But I bring my unknowing which is a tangible thing, a clear space, something that's been made room for out of the muddle of ordinary psychic stuff, an empty space.

INTERVIEWERS

In one of your essays you recall the Zen statement "Summoned not created" when speaking about this.

TRAVERS

Yes, that really describes it. You know C.S. Lewis, whom I greatly admire, said: "There's no such thing as creative writ-

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ing." I've always agreed with that and always refuse to teach it when given the opportunity. He said: "There is, in fact, only one Creator and we mix." That's our function, to mix the elements He has given us. See how wonderfully anonymous that leaves us? You can't say, "*I* did this; this gross matrix of flesh and blood and sinews and nerves did this." What nonsense! I'm given these things to make a pattern out of. Something gave it to me.

I've always loved the idea of the craftsman, the anonymous man. For instance, I've always wanted my books to be called the work of Anon, because Anon is my favorite literary character. If you look through an anthology of poems that go from the far past into the present time, you'll see that all the poems signed "Anon" have a very specific flavor that is one flavor all the way through the centuries. I think, perhaps arrogantly, of myself as "Anon." I would like to think that *Mary Poppins* and the other books could be called back to make that change. But I suppose it's too late for that.

INTERVIEWERS

What do you think of the books of Carlos Castaneda?

TRAVERS

I like them very much. They take me into a world where I fear I will not belong. It's a bit more occult than my world, but I like Don Juan's idea about what a warrior is and how a warrior should live. In a way, we all have to live like warriors; that's the same as being the hero of one's own story. I feel that Castaneda has been taken into other dimensions of thinking and experiencing. I don't pretend to understand them, and I think I understand why Castaneda is so slow to give interviews and tries to separate himself from all of that. He doesn't want to explain. These things can't be explained in ordinary terms.

You know, in America, everybody thinks there's an answer to every question. They're always saying, "But why and how?" They always think there is a solution. There is a great fortitude in that and a great sense of optimism. In Europe, we are so old that we know there are certain things to which there is not an answer. And you will remember, in this regard, that Mary

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Poppins' chief characteristic, apart from her tremendous vanity, is that she never explains. I often wonder why people write and ask me to explain this and that. I'll write back and say that Mary Poppins didn't explain, so neither can I or neither will I. So many people ask me, "Where does she go?" Well, I say, if the book hasn't said that, then it's up to you to find out. I'm not going to write footnotes to *Mary Poppins*. That would be absolutely presumptuous, and at the same time it would be assuming that I know. It's the fact that she's unknown that's so intriguing to readers.

INTERVIEWERS

There's that same quality about Castaneda.

TRAVERS

There is. His is a more deliberate unknown. It's as though he were hiding, I often think. And I don't know why, psychologically, he is doing that but I respect that hiding nonetheless. He has some idea in it.

You see, you've got a great wealth of myth in America and he has tapped it. And some of the writers on American Indian affairs have tapped it. But in a way it's foreign to us. You see how often Castaneda, as a modern man and a non-Indian, becomes sick, physically sick, with the experiences. It almost seems to me that they're not for us. The Mexican Indians are, after all, a very old race.

I lived with the Indians, or I lived on the reservations, for two summers during the war. John Collier, who was then the Administrator for Indian Affairs, was a great friend of mine and he saw that I was very homesick for England but couldn't go back over those mineswept waters. And he said, "I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll send you to live with the Indians." "That's mockery," I replied, "What good will that do me?" He said, "You'll see."

I'd never been out West and I went to stay on the Navaho reservation at Administration House which is at Window Rock beyond Gallup. Collier had sent a letter to the members of the committee at Administration House and asked them to take me about so that I could see the land and meet the Indians.

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They very kindly did. Fortunately, I was able to ride and I was equipped with jeans and boots and a western saddle. Then I saw that the Indian women wore big, wide, flounced Spanish skirts with little velvet jackets. And I, who don't like trousers very much, said I must have one of those. So they made me a flouneed skirt and a velvet jacket, and I rode with the Indians. It was wonderful the way they turned towards me when, instead of being an Eastern dude, I put on their skirt.

One day the head of Administration House asked me if I would give a talk to the Indians. And I said, "How could I talk to them, these ancient people? It is they who could tell me things." He said, "Try." So they came into what I suppose was a clubhouse, a big place with a stage, and I stood on the stage and the place was full of Indians. I told them about England, because she was at war then, and all that was happening. I said that for me England was the place "Where the Sun Rises" because, you see, England is east of where I was. I said, "Over large water." And I told them about the children who were being evacuated from the cities and some of the experiences of the children. I put it as mythologically as I could, just very simple sayings.

At the end there was dead silence. I turned to the man who had introduced me and said, "I'm sorry. I failed, I haven't got across." And he said, "You wait. You don't know them as well as I do." And every Indian in that big hall came up and took me silently by the hand, one after another. That was their way of expressing feeling with me.

I never knew such depths of silence, internally and externally, as I experienced in the Navaho desert. One night I was taken at full moon away into the desert where they were having a meeting before they had their dancing. There were crowds of Indians there, about two thousand under the moon. And before the proceedings began there was no sound in the desert amongst those people except the occasional cry of a baby or the rattle of a horse's harness or the crackling of fire under a pot—those natural sounds that really don't take anything from the silence.

They waited it seemed to me hours before the first man got

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up to speak. Naturally, I didn't understand what they were saying. But I listened to the speeches and I enjoyed the silences all night long. And when the night was far spent, they began to dance. Not in the usual dances of the corn dance, they had their ordinary clothes on and were dancing two-and-two, going around and around a fire, a man and a woman. And I was told that if you're asked to dance by a man and you don't want to dance, you give him a silver coin. So one Indian did come up but I went with him. I couldn't do the dance, even though it wasn't a very intricate dance; it was more a little short step round and round, just these two people together. So we two strangers danced around the fire. It was very moving to me. And we came back to the House in the early morning.

And, of course, I saw lots of the regular dances with Navahos and the Hopis, and later with the Pueblos. The Indians in the Pueblo tribe gave me an Indian name and they said I must never reveal it. Every Indian has a secret name as well as his public name. This moved me very much because I have a strong feeling about names, that names are a part of a person, a very private thing to each one. I'm always amazed at the way Christian names are seized upon in America as if by right instead of as something to be given. One of the fairy tales, "Rumplestiltskin," deals with the extraordinary privacy and inward nature of the name. It's always been a big taboo in the fairy tales and in myth that you do not name a person. Many primitive people do not like you to speak and praise a child to its face, for instance, and they will make a cross or sign against evil when you do that, even in Ireland sometimes.

INTERVIEWERS

What do you think of the contemporary interest in religion and myth, particularly among young people? Do you sense that in the last few years a large number of people have grown interested in spiritual disciplines—yoga, Zen, meditation and the like?

TRAVERS

Yes, definitely. It shows the deep, disturbed undercurrents that there are in man, that he is really looking for something

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that is more than a thing. This is a civilization devoted to things. What they're looking for is something that they cannot possess but serve, something higher than themselves.

I'm all with them in their search because it is my search, too. But I've searched for it all my life. And when I'm asked to speak about myth, I nearly always find it's not known. There's no preparation. There's nothing for the words to fall on. People haven't read the fairy tales.

INTERVIEWERS

What reading would you recommend for children and adults?

TRAVERS

I should send people right back to the fairy tales. The Bible, of course. Even the nursery rhymes. You can find things there. As I was saying, when you think of "Humpty Dumpty"—"... All the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't put Humpty together again"—that's a wonderful story, a fable that some things are impossible. And when children learn that, they accept that there are certain things that can't be, and it's a most delicate and indirect way to have it go into them.

I feel that the indirect teaching is what is needed. All school teaching is a direct giving of information. But everything I do is by hint and suggestion. That's what I think gets into the inner ear.

INTERVIEWERS

Nowadays, then, you see behind the headlines a renewed interest in the Divine Mother.

TRAVERS

I've said several times that I think women's liberation is, in a way, an aspect of realizing the Divine Mother. Not that I think women's libbers are Divine Mothers. Far from it. But I think the feminine principle, which we could say the Divine Mother embodies, is rising. All I want is that they don't use the feminine principle in order to turn themselves into men. We have all that we need as women. We just don't recognize it, some of us.

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I am happily a woman. Nothing in me resents it. All of me accepts it and always has. Mind you, I haven't suffered. I haven't been in a profession where women are paid less than men. Nothing has been hard for me as a woman. But I sympathize with women who want to live themselves to the full. But I don't think you can do that by being a Madison Avenue executive or president of a women's bank. All those things I've never wanted.

Women belong in myth. We have to think of the ideas of yin and yang. So I feel we're really sitting, if we only knew, exactly where we ought to be, where the Divine Mother sits. If we don't know this is so, then it isn't so.

INTERVIEWERS

If Mary Poppins invented you, not vice versa, as you say, can you imagine what would have happened to you if she hadn't come along?

TRAVERS

Oh, I've never thought about it. It has never occurred to me to think that way, because, you see, we aren't given the opportunity of leading parallel lives. What would I have done if I hadn't done this? I have no means of knowing, because one life is all we get. It would have had something to do with the stage, dancing. But then, actresses grow old, dancers grow wobbly, whereas a writer still has a typewriter. And I think I've been learning and growing in writing all these years. If there's a life after death, I want to work.

INTERVIEWERS

Is there going to be another Mary Poppins book?

TRAVERS

Well, I have a sense of another lurking, "lurking" is the word, like a burglar, round and round the house. That's all I can say at the moment.

—**Edwina Burness**
Jerry Griswold

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The Barrier

by Don Asher

By the late 1940s I knew the blacks had something I was in dire need of, and I was young and intrepid and naïve enough to go looking for it.

From 52nd to 140th Street the winds of change were blowing strong. The convulsions of black-rebellion music exploding out of the theaters and cafés of Harlem had startled white musicians, turned us around; the music was angry, blazing, ferocious—yet always under a tight edge of control. "It's a rogue boat heading for the New World," a black Boston drummer told me, "and Bird and Diz are the navigators."

I'd become aware of a widening chasm separating the levels of rhythmic propulsion achieved by white and black musicians. The former's playing was more even-keeled, linear, lacking the sudden dips and spurts, the coiled-spring tension-and-release and unexpected displacement of meter that sent the beat slamming and teetering down the tracks like a highballing express, generating incredible excitement. I was convinced there was something basic and vital that came easily to them

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and hard to us. I'd noticed, too, that at integrated jam sessions blacks and whites tended to call different tunes. When I'd suggested "Have You Met Miss Jones?" at an after-hours club a black had scoffed goodnaturedly, "That's one of your white-boy tunes." A similar judgment was passed on Gershwin's "A Foggy Day." Blacks leaned toward tunes with relaxed, more fluid structures—"Willow Weep For Me," "Georgia on My Mind"—written as often by white as black composers. "Willow's more leisurely and doesn't sweat," a black bass player said, "you got time to climb inside it, feel its bones, poke your way around. Your average Caucasian tune is boxy, four-squared, forces you into corners."

Other blacks I talked to found the whole subject of racial-genetic orientation distasteful, awakening the old we-got-rhythm stereotypes and images of grinning darkies dancing for pennies on southern street corners. "All you got to remember when you're blowing," a black drummer told me, "is one simple thing: Rice Krispies—snap, crackle, pop." A tenor sax player I worked with at a Worcester Turnpike club was at once more specific and expansive: "Dancing and singing and love-making and making music have no more to do with color than making mudpies or building snowmen. Music's color-blind. Absolutely. Ofay players occasionally pull my sleeve, talkin' about their whiteness closing them off from certain secrets of the trade. Listen to me: *there ain't no secrets.* We all came out of the same alley. How you play has to do with who you listened to when you were coming up, who you hung out with and picked up on. Gershwin picked up on the Harlem rent-party players and wrote himself *Porgy and Bess*. There's a new young cat, concert player, Andre Watts, black as his namesake in California; plays Chopin and Debussy like he's tuned into their graves."

I was unpersuaded and would make many pilgrimages in the coming years to the ghetto clubs and after-hours joints (where passing remarks dropped on an ofay could be coolly withering and edged with menace: *You from somewhere else and lost your way, Jim, or just slummin'? . . . Hey, lemme ast you somethin'—the buckles on the shoes means you're queer,*

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right?), tracking the elusive secret, searching out the passion and sensibility of the black man. Hoping for a miracle of transmutation.

My first stop: the New World, north of 110th Street.

Harlem was beginning to put on a hostile face for the Caucasian *turista*. The years when affluent whites could pass a flavorful evening slumming in the district's cafés and restaurants were nearing an end. Making the rounds of the celebrated places I'd read of and been told about—Savoy Ballroom, Small's Paradise, Apollo Theater, Royal Roost, and Minton's Playhouse with its faded awning and dingy wall mirrors, where the musical rebellion had ignited in the early Forties—I was an easy target for frisky young Harlem bloods, easy to pick out for reasons beyond my whiteness.

"Look how slick this boy looks in his green sky. That chapeau come from Switzerland, right?" (I was nineteen and affecting a spruce kelly-green alpine hat.)

"I guess. Originally. . ."

"What you call a mountain hat."

"Alpine, yes."

"Now what might a elegant lid like that be worth would you say in the current market?"

"Stop cappin' on the boy, Clarence, he's just around to hear the sounds."

"Well now, if he wants to dwell in our sunshine he got to come out of the shade. . ."

A half-formed sense of vulnerability told me it was time to cut out.

"The hat came out of a trash bin. I doubt you could get four bits for it. See you guys. . ." I waved off amicably and headed across the street—solemn dark faces keeping vigil above me, gazing down from lighted brick-framed windows—to the storefront café from which music crackled and charged through the open door into the mild evening like a tangle of high-tension wires.

What I heard inside was something fierce, uncompromising and beautiful, an abrasive fiery sound that ran roughshod through all previously decreed rhythmic and harmonic struc-

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tures. Here were the fabled "cutting sessions" I'd been told about—initiation rites which were in effect pitched battles, mostly black on black, for whites were still chary of joining the fray. Musicians spoke of "taking" one another, were scornful of outsiders, and waited eagerly to ambush anyone who arrived with a burgeoning reputation. *Jump, chump, or I'll burn you up, you don't know nothin'.* After a few nights I began to understand that these sessions served as pressure cookers in which one earned recognition and respect. Reputations could be made, reinforced or savaged in the course of one scorching set, and amateurs and imposters got weeded out in a hurry; in the annealing process the music tightened up, grew leaner, more sublime.

I asked about the policy of sitting in and was told, "Anyone can, but you better be able to fly real good or they'll shoot you down, burn you up." And watching night after night in the close-packed, churning clubs I saw how awesome the firepower was onstage, how efficiently those without strong wings were cut down. These were schooled, confident, nerveless musicians who had found within themselves a core of calm enabling them to adjust to the roaring tempos and turbulent patterns, a cool and secret site from which to launch their blazing cascades of notes. They had done battle in a thousand sessions, knew their horns inside out and could not be fazed by key or tempo. Nor did they show any mercy, constantly raising the ante, calling unconventional tunes with swift-changing harmonies in strange keys at tempos so fast you either flew or fell. I suffered in vicarious misery with a pianist who sat with his hands in his lap throughout a tune kicked off at a vicious tempo, then quietly rose and retreated with a foolish downcast smile and pitiful squaring of shoulders that was like an attempt to pull a tattered threadbare cloak of dignity about himself. That was it, you either measured up or slunk away. It didn't take me but a minute to realize I was nowhere near ready for this league; they were lying in wait for the likes of me. *If you don't have the price of admission, stay out of the hall.* I began to suspect that the skills required for entry—so deeply ingrained in the Negro experience of despair, anger and struggle—might lie forever

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beyond my reach.

Chastised, I returned to Boston, where I was studying at the Berklee College of Music while supporting myself playing occasional gigs with Rudy Yellin's Society Orchestra, and continued my search in the black after-hours clubs of eastern Massachusetts; here the music would be less convulsive and searing, the animus more manageable.

For a young white traversing the urban ghettos during the Fifties a horn case was often a talisman of safe passage.

"What you got in there, man?"

"Alto sax. On my way to a session."

"Oh? Where at?"

Possessing no such identifying badge and looking the way I did (a turnpike barmaid had once remarked behind my back, "The breath my seven-year-old uses to blow out his birthday candles would bowl him over"), I improvised: a sheaf of music manuscript paper under my arm, or an empty battered clarinet case I'd found discarded in a union-hall trash can. Often I came directly from a gig in my tux; this could prove an advantage—smoothing the rites of passage—or (more likely) a liability, depending on the character of the district I was passing through. I usually took the precaution of removing my bow tie and wearing a beat-up raincoat over the soup and fish.

Colleagues at the Berklee School steered me to Coffee John's, an after-hours place on lower Massachusetts Avenue. The doors opened around ten, but the real action didn't get under way until after midnight when musicians began dropping by from work to drink and jam. A dingy narrow corridor of a room lined with scarred wooden booths faced a small cramped stage.

Guileless, fortified by an instinctive faith in my own inviolability and the holiness of my cause, I sauntered one night into turbulent sound and close-together black faces, white teeth, hands holding cups and glasses of coffee laced with rye and gin, a low-pitched jumble of voices beneath the music's pulse, the square patch of dance floor paced with weaving bodies. For the better part of a week I hung out (when I told my white friends where I'd been until four in the morning they blanched),

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standing alone at the beer-and-wine bar, which shut down by law at one o'clock and was separated from the main room by a shoulder-high partition, listening to the music and watching the dancers, ignored but for an occasional curious or indifferent stare, a half-frown etched in a questioning glance. On a Sunday night I asked if I could sit in. The music was strong and gutty but within my ken. I knew most of the tunes; the tempos seemed comfortable. I sensed that one or two of the pianists could play rings around me, but the rings were concentric and not all that wide. I felt I wouldn't be embarrassed as I would have been at the incandescent Harlem sessions.

The trumpet player nominally in charge of the session nodded (I learned later that many of the participating musicians were out of work, that a handful of key players were paid a few dollars a night for their midnight-to-four A.M. stints) and the pianist, Lonnie, slid off the stool and leaned against a booth, hands in pockets, his stony gaze sliding past my shoulder. I fiddled with the stool's height, inadvertently lowering it, then spinning it up a few revolutions, hearing mocking, skeptical voices behind me: "Already I don't like the looks of this" and "What's this peckerwood gonna do, tune it?" and "Come back, Lonnie, all's forgiven."

" 'Blue Skies' okay?" the trumpet player said.

"Sure."

"One flat, you got four bars. 'Bout here," he said, snapping his thumb and middle finger in a lazy circle.

The rhythm falling in behind me was jagged and looser than it had sounded from the floor, looser than I was accustomed to—bass and drums glancing off the beat, churning and slipping around it, rather than hammering it down four-square like spikes in a railbed. Several times I felt the meter sliding out from under my fingers. When this occurred the bass player steadied into a fundamental four-to-the-bar stroll, laying groundwork beneath me; at the same time I experienced the childhood sensation of being effortlessly lifted up on his shoulders (as an uncle had once hoisted me on a summer morning so I could see the parade unfolding down Worcester's main

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street). The dancers, I noticed uneasily, were drifting off the floor, some shaking their heads. "It don't get it," I heard someone say. I struggled through two more tunes, hands cramping and sweat dropping off my chin onto the keys until the board was slick as an ice rink. The dancers never returned.

The bass player, whose name was Lucius, a slim greying man with high cheekbones and a burgundy cast to his skin, took me aside after the set. "You want a honest critique?" he said and continued even as I nodded earnestly, mopping my face. "The dancers was off balance, that's why they deserted, they couldn't pat their feet right or make their proper moves. You was playing rhythmic enough, don't misapprehend me, but it was too straight-ahead and ricky-tick, if you catch my drift. We're used to a wider beat, space and margin to move around in. It's like a woman sashaying down a wide alleyway swinging her hips and buns, used to plenty of leeway so's she won't bruise herself on the walls, you picture it? Now that alleyway suddenly *narrows* on her and this fine bitch is getting bruised, *hurting*, so naturally she's going to cut out. What you got to do is listen to me and the iron and skins more intensely. . ."

I knew what he meant, sort of. Whether I could do anything about it was another matter. The twin legacies I had to overcome were my white upbringing and a two-year stretch playing businessman's-bounce show tunes, horas and Viennese waltzes with a clam-and-chowder society band.

I don't know why they kept letting me sit in; it must have taken guts, or simpleness, on my part to ask. Perhaps they were flattered by my interest in their music and derived satisfaction from the role reversal at a time when there were no black teachers in the public schools; or they may have found amusement in the spectacle of Master Charles getting turned on, picking their brains, trying to dwell in their sunshine—tolerant of me because I was just a skinny, earnest, funny-ass kid and not too obvious a nigger lover.

I became aware of a grudging cordiality as I poked my head in each night just after twelve bells. "Here comes the gopher in the watermelon patch" (Nestor, the bartender) and "Where's the sergeant-at-arms? Who let this white trash in?" As I made

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my way up the stand a gruff, good-natured raillery followed me. "Better be wearin' your asbestos vest, boy. . . This paddy's gonna get his feathers clipped again. . . What's he gonna play for us tonight, 'Ol' Man Ribber' or 'Short'nin' Bread'?"

There was a beautiful tawny-skinned singer who occasionally sat in. She worked in a show bar on Columbus Avenue and would arrive after one-thirty in a luxurious leather coat, a silver tiara riding a towering knot of blue-black hair, eyes liquid and glittering with the night. Her name was Jonella; a chain smoker with a rich deep grainy voice (which was *why* she smoked, she insisted, to retain that *timbre*), she was always a little stoned, or seemed so to me, saying funny unconnected things, her luminous heavy-lidded eyes looking at you and sliding past you at the same time.

"Don't bust your conk, baby," she'd say to me, apropos of nothing, "everything's gonna be everything."

One night after I'd backed her for a set she introduced the musicians, inventing names she didn't know or remember ("On drums, in lavender trunks and green bathrobe, weighing in at one sixty-four and three-eighths, Rufus Funk, Jr."), and when it came my turn—"Let's give this slick boy on piano whose name I'll think of in a minute a hand for comin' across town and filling in so capably. He's all by his lonesome, innocent and taking care of business, so all you scroungy-ass chicks out there keep your hands off him, hear?" The crowd snickered and guffawed, enjoying the banter.

Off the stand, blowing plumes of smoke over my shoulder, she said, "You starting to get it, baby. You only got one main obstacle to surmount as I see it, which is that when I grew up tapping my feet and clapping my hands, singing 'All God's Chillun' in my uncle's church you were singing 'Rock of Ages' and 'God Bless America.' But don't pay it too much mind," she advised, her liquid eyes gliding past me, " 'cause one of these days you're gonna score a touchdown and fifty thousand people'll be watching the game."

She had a cousin or half brother, Wesley—both were vague about the relationship—with the same distracted opaline gaze. Wesley washed cars during the day and came to Coffee John's

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every night, sometimes sitting in on conga drum or beating a woodblock with a drumstick during Latin tunes. He spent a lot of time in the men's room, and when he wasn't there or on the stand he flitted genially up and down the line of booths, stopping to chat and sample a spiked coffee. In regard to me, he gave generously of his counsel.

"What this boy should do is spend some nights at the Arcady Lounge over on Huntington, observe how those ace bitches synchronizes their hips and butts to the drummer's accents—that's where he'll learn to swing."

"Now what would you know about swing, Wesley?" someone chimed in disdainfully. "You couldn't swing a Mickey Mouse watch on a rubber band."

"I'm sayin' the ec-*dysiasts* is where it's at—those righteous ebon girls wriggling their saucy dusters!" Wesley exclaimed, eyes widening and gleaming in opalescent splendor. "Couple nights at the Arcady that beat'll begin to sink in like pilin's in a riverbed. Can't help but happen!"

The next time I saw him he'd forgotten the ecdysiasts; New York City was where I should go to pursue my education. "If the boy's serious in his endeavor"—the discussions seemed always to be directed past or lobbed over me, as if my presence were an obstacle to be circumvented—"he's got to earn his credits. The only place to pick up that final diploma is the University of the Streets of New York."

"The Apple is cool," someone observed somberly, "but rotten at the co'."

"I've already been," I said. "It's rough."

"It's where you got to go to pick up the pearls," Wesley continued, unheeding.

"You got to slog though some heavy mud to get to them pearls," the other said, dubious.

"There's nothin' new, man," a third interjected. "There's nothin' *new*! You don't have to set off your back porch. Just hang out, pick up an' get nervous like the rest of us."

"In that town," Wesley said with a touch of awe in his voice, "without the proper credits you can't even cross 125th Street, never mind Fifth Avenue."

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I no longer felt the need to carry manuscript paper or an empty clarinet case with me, and had ceased standing alone at the bar; in the crowded cozy booths my jug became communal, alternating with the pints and half pints of my colleagues. On the bruised upright (that was treated lovingly, tuned once a month) I was starting to get it, at least some nights I thought I was (*it* is as hard to define as pornography, but I know it when I hear it), assimilating the displaced, driving rhythms and crackling improvisational patterns, sharpening my ear and expanding my repertoire. My fondest dream was that the Coffee John's regulars would one night rise en masse as I came off the stand, shouting, "The blue-eyed devil plays black!" From Lucius and Everett, a massive older pianist with a wild tangle of snow-flecked hair and rollicking bravura stride style reminiscent of Fats Waller's, I was discovering what "time" meant—the *quality* of the beat, just as timbre is the quality of the tone—and learning to function at very fast and very slow tempos. At slow tempos the beat has to *swell*, Lucius told me, and passed on the concept of his friend, the fiery West Coast pianist, Hampton Hawes: "It's like taking yourself a mouthful of good wine, swishing it around, savoring it before you let it go down; the swallow is that beat finally dropping." On up-tempos Everett showed me how to stay loose and relaxed by visualizing myself riding a train "rocketing along at a good clip, ninety-miles an hour or more, but it doesn't trouble you 'cause you're sitting there cool and collected, your body swaying and rocking naturally with the train's pulse, which is the drums and bass. You don't need to be stomping your feet and getting all cramped up and over-excited." He suggested I listen to some old piano-roll rags and gave me a list of recordings. "That's where everything comes out of. Get that feeling down and it'll open an alley up the middle of your style wide enough for a moose to swing in. Inside the same eight bars there's sass, there's ecstasy, there's heartbreak. And listen to the Iowa boy, Beiderbecke, the cornet on 'I'm Comin' Virginia.' Same thing." (I listened. Bix's horn, rising from a morass of tubas, banjos and trap drums, rang like a carillon in the mountains, lonely, sorrowful and piercing. And those old

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rags that made my scalp tingle and triggered a grainy current down my backbone—what was there in them, even the jaunty ones, that left such a residue of sadness and ache?)

But the supreme lesson I was beginning to absorb—and it's an abstract and elusive one—is that "time" should be as natural as a heartbeat pumping pure fresh blood into a tune.

There were occasional nights when the clientele turned over or out-of-town musicians dropped by, and the attitude toward me could change as swiftly as the sky on a March day. As soon as I walked in I could feel, like a radio's hum before the sound begins, a tension rise in the room, the friendly or incurious looks of the previous weeks suddenly vigilant and somber. When I sat in, a standard tune would be called in a strange key at a murderous tempo—much faster than the regulars would ever kick it off. An unmistakable chill, unsheathed daggers on the stand. I couldn't help but remember what had befallen musicians with suspect credentials at the ferocious Harlem sessions, where the take-charge players had showed no mercy, ambushing newcomers and forcing them to retire in disgrace. I floundered badly through a headlong "Perdido"—the conclusion greeted out front by embarrassed silence, broken by an angry voice I recognized as Jonella's. "Raise up off the boy, biggie, you don't need to show all those feathers." The intent was plain: Master Charles lured into the deep end of the pool before being blown out of the water.

If you didn't bring your cleats, stay off the field.

Jonella slipped an arm around my shoulder as I came off the stand, sweat-soaked and confused. "Don't pay those uppity dudes any mind, baby. They'll be pickin' trash out of the gutter while you're riding the elephant down the main street, just wait 'n' see. Everything's gonna be everything."

It was a sobering reminder that despite the previous air of congeniality and counsel, the barrier was still there and always would be—made up of divergent experiences, temperament, attitudes—a skin-thin membrane but tough and impervious as sheet metal.

Gun-shy, licking my wounds, I stayed off the stand for a few nights. Then, with no sign of the marauders' return, I

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wandered gingerly back, testing the water. On a Friday, a week after my humiliation, I had a good night, winning accolades after my solos, and only Jonella's absence prevented my sense of triumph and renewed self-esteem from being complete. When she came in a little later, I said, "I scored a touchdown, baby, you didn't even see the game."

She regarded me in her glancing sidelong way. "You're not only beginning to play colored, you're talkin' colored."

"Well, you right."

Her look turned reproachful. "Now don't you go cappin' on me with that nigger talk. You be respectful."

"Jonella, listen, I respect you more than anyone I know."

Something cunning infiltrated her expression. The tapering face with its yellowish-mauve tinge, glistening red mouth and luminous eyes was like an exotic African flower, and my heart slammed in my throat. She grinned at me then—an audacious, violent smile—gave her shoulders a brief wild shake and, pivoting regally in her satin dress and spike heels, sashayed down the line of booths.

She didn't seem to belong to anyone. She usually arrived alone and left alone—unless it was with her cousin (or half-brother) Wesley—and was no longer working at the Columbus Avenue show bar. I had dropped by to see her early one night and found the place shuttered. Lacking the courage of my infatuation I never asked to see her home, wherever it was. There was no way I was going to leave the club with her; not in 1952 on the outskirts of Dorchester at four in the morning weighing 130 pounds in a winter overcoat.

But she was right, the rhythms and idioms of the black culture were permeating my speech patterns as well as the texture of my playing. "Ain't that a bitch," I might say, registering surprise, wonder or delight. I no longer departed, I "cut out." "A nickel" was five dollars, and "a dime" ten. I wore a "sky" or "lid," not a hat. Someone trying to get my attention was "pulling my coat," and a musician playing strong and confidently with an element of grandstanding was "showing feathers" or "fluffing out his feathers"; if I were greatly impressed by his performance I "wigged." With reference to

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women, "ace broad" or "fine bitch" were expressions of the highest approbation, but Charles had better be careful in what context and with what inflection he flaunted the argot.

One night I had my first taste of pot. ("Tea," "Mary Jane," and "shit" were the prevailing expressions then.) I don't know how I'd avoided it for so long, except that its use was nowhere near as universal as it would become a decade later. I knew Wesley and others were lighting up in the john—I had been present once or twice when a joint was being passed around—and this night, by whim, or an accident of timing, I was included. "Try some of this Panama Red," Wesley said casually as the joint came back to him from a youth in a tattersall vest. I'd wondered off and on about the sensation and saw no reason not to indulge; it would be a sociable gesture as well as a new experience, akin to accepting a passed-around jug in the booths and taking a pull without wiping the neck. "It's truly evil shit, señor," Tattersall Vest said in a choked voice. I had watched enough musicians smoke to know what to do. The joint had a rich powerful aroma, a piney fragrance. I took several deep pulls, holding the smoke in my lungs as long as I could. When I left the toilet I felt a languorous buzz in one ear as if a somnolent and not particularly bothersome fly had lodged there; and moments later an airy drifting lightness as if my brain had come unmoored and were floating gravity-free around my skull much like the flakes in a paperweight globe. Well, I thought leisurely, this shit is a gas. I don't know how long I stood by the stage listening to the music, all soft peaks and hollows, watching through a trembling blue curtain of smoke the congenial clusters of Coffee John's regulars, brothers all (ace boon coons), smoking and jiving and sipping their spiked coffee. Lucius was beckoning me back to the stand. Grinning loosely, confidently (someone told me later), I spun the vacated stool up and up—for some reason it was imperative that I assume a commanding position over the board; it took a long time to reach its summit. The trumpet player, Hardy, called "Black and Blue" and began snapping his fingers in a soft staccato crack, his hand tracing blurred ovals before my eyes. I played a four-bar intro, notes slipping effortlessly off my

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fingers (long-stemmed flowers trailing from a crystal vase). Innumerable languid choruses drifted by, brass and reeds soloing. Someone poked me in the back: my turn. I broke out and away (a limber colt), chords stacking neatly beneath my left hand like rubber coits, the right hand fleet, darting, venturous. After what seemed a half dozen choruses I reined in (not wanting to show too many feathers), looking around for one of the horns to reenter. "Keep goin'," Hardy said. "Enough, six choruses, don't wanna hog," I responded. Hardy was smiling down at me in a puzzled, half-frowning way. "You ain't even reached the bridge of your first yet."

I remember little else of the evening, only of sauntering down the long corridor of booths—the gritty linoleum floor oddly soft and yielding as if I were walking on blankets or cork—a close-up gallery of faces gleaming at me like dark ivory through the sifting lavender smoke. I seemed to be taking a sinuous path, wandering unwillingly from booth to booth, my shoulders thumping against the wooden supports; it was like promenading the deck of a rolling ship without the accompanying sensation of vertigo. As I lurched for the door someone opened it for me, then someone else was hugging me, someone who smelled like a whole backyard of gardenias; a warm, faintly disappointing embrace, though, one of fraternity rather than romance. "Baby, you feelin' awright?"

"I'm cool," I told Jonella. "Everything's everythin'."

"Had hisself some o' Wesley's Panama Red," a disembodied voice said as the throbbing, pumping music propelled me out the door like a giant hand pushing at my back.

I recall getting in my car and a wall of honking horns behind me, then rolling weightlessly from window to window in the deep swaying back seat of a taxi. I woke at 2:30 the next afternoon in my room on Fairfield Street feeling unanchored, my extremities—fingers, toes, ears—numb and tingling as if I'd been out on a freezing day underdressed and was just beginning to thaw. I drank something cold and metallic-tasting from a juice jar in the refrigerator, dressed and caught a bus to Massachusetts Avenue to look for my Studebaker. It took me an hour and a half, starting at Coffee John's and roaming in widening

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concentric circles, under sober observation from upper-story windows, the framed faces as fixed, doleful and expressionless as those in old sepia photographs. The car was parked five blocks west of the club. The right rear wheel was up on the curb and the headlights were burning; a ticket under the wiper flapped in a gusting wind. The key was still in the ignition. I got in, shut off the lights and tried to start the motor, noticing two youths watching from the opposite curb. It whirred thinly, coughed, tubercular. . . faded. I waited a half minute and tried again: a feeble complaint, another quiet cough, and she died like a dog. The two observers were crossing the street toward me, one tall and slim with a thin fuzz of mustache, wearing a poplin jacket; the other was much smaller and lighter-skinned, a plumpish baby face tucked in the hood of a bulky gray sweat shirt. I rolled down the window and asked where the nearest gas station was.

"Got yourself some trouble, huh?" the tall youth said. "Why don't we take us a peek under the hood."

Maybe like Wesley he worked with cars; black kids, I thought, seemed to know a lot about cars. I got out and lifted the hood, propping it on its stick.

The two silently inclined their heads, inspecting the innards. "Hard to say," the tall boy said after a moment.

"Where's the nearest station?" I asked again.

"Oh, there's nothing for a ways around here," the tall boy said. He stuck his hands in his poplin jacket, regarding me in an unhurried thoughtful manner.

"We could use money for ciggies," the other said in a piping voice that matched his face, the light brown eyes limpid, vacuous, trusting, hands folded into the gray pouch of his sweat shirt.

"I. . . didn't bring my wallet," I said truthfully, shivering a little though it wasn't that cold, wishing I had brought my empty clarinet case for show.

"Any kind of change will do," the tall boy said reasonably.

"I only brought bus fare, some quarters. . ." I fumbled in my pants pocket.

"That'll get it,' the tall boy said, holding out a soft palm as

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pink as a frosted wafer.

I looked around me, at the afternoon shadows darkening the brick buildings, the sun hanging wan and thin, a pale disc pasted on the rim of the November sky; a gust of wind blew dry papers along the gutter. I played the coins carefully into the pink palm. "I'm a musician," I blurted and knew immediately it was a mistake.

"Oh?" The tall boy pocketed the change. "Where at do you play?"

"Coffee John's. Actually I just sit in nights whenever—"

"Where's that at?" The tall youth's eyes had rolled leisurely upward and away, the mouth compressed and rubbery.

"Over on Mass. Avenue, maybe five blocks—"

"What d'you play?" the small boy asked, respectful.

"Piano," I said, which was my second mistake.

The small boy brought something out of the pouch of his sweat shirt, pressed a thumb to it—there was a faint whirring sound—and drew it carefully along the back of my right hand; I thought I heard a soft tearing, like tissue paper parting. Both youths were racing down the street then, yards apart; the small plump boy surprisingly swift, outdistancing the other. The surrounding buildings were now completely in shadow and a piercing chill had fallen over the street. With a sigh I dropped my eyes. There was a thin red line across the knuckles, the skin parted delicately like paper. I reclined against the fender of the car, watching the blood suddenly bloom, incredibly bright, bubbling and winking like a ruby chain in artificial light.

The wind had risen; it had grown colder. I was glancing listlessly toward both intersections and around at the silent darkening buildings, wondering which way to turn or go, or whether to go anywhere at all, when a car stopped in the middle of the street. "What's up, man, what's the problem?"

It was Wesley, poking his head out the window of a faded green Chevy, the whites of his eyes flaring as they fixed on the bloodsoaked handkerchief. Everett was in the passenger seat beside him. They pulled over to the curb and got out.

Everett took my hand in his and gently peeled back the clotted cloth; I felt nothing.

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Wesley's breath expelled as if he'd been punched in the chest. "Oh, man, who did you like that?"

"Couple kids. Couldn't've been more than fifteen..." I motioned my head vaguely in the direction they had fled.

"You jus' never knows any more, all these weirdies cruisin' the avenues. Why jus' last week I was over Huntington comin' out of—"

"Stop the damn jabbering and let's *go*," Everett said, "we got to get this nigger to a doctor."

Riding between them, my legs cushioned by Everett's massive thighs—a fat man's inadvertent caress—a tangle of emotions swept in on me. Bewilderment and wonder that the locus of the music that was my breath and heartbeat should also be the source of animosity and venom. It would take courage to venture to this part of town again; the barrier had been raised a notch, made more forbidding, fortified with steel.... But even as the pain took hold of my hand with the car's jounce and rattle, my spirits began to lift, a small glow of assurance warmed me as Everett's words echoed far back in my mind... *Let's go, we got to get this nigger to a doctor.* Within the urgency, the humorous play and idiom, was a suggestion of alliance, kinship, acceptance: I had made it a little way through the barrier.

I turned to Wesley. "That was some powerful Panama Red last night."

Wesley nodded solemnly. "I can dig it."

A thin white scar remains, riding the ridge of the knuckles like a badge of initiation, an emblem of battle.

I never scored the big touchdown, never made it all the way through to the other side—none of us whiteys do—but ten years later, when I was house pianist at the *hungry i* in San Francisco, a middle-aged black man approached me in the bar following an entr'acte medley of Duke Ellington tunes. He said he had enjoyed the music and that I must have grown up or spent a lot of time around Harlem to play like that. I told him I had been born and bred in eastern Massachusetts. "Okay," he said, "but somewhere along the line you must've eaten some okra and sweet potato pie."

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Portfolio

Couples

Eric Fischl

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The Cigarette Boat

Barbara Milton

It was St. Patrick's Day in Miami. Bryn Corley was looking in the mirror, deciding whether or not to curl her hair. When she curled it, it came out tight and blonde and emphatic like Jean Harlow's; when she sleeked it off her face the Grace Kelly came forward.

How she looked tonight was very important. She and Frank Kiernan had been invited to dine at the home of Maggie Bickle, a rich and very well-connected old woman. It was not inconceivable that Robert Mitchum would be there. Bryn thought she would curl her hair.

This could be her big break. She had an idea that if she walked into an office—any office, even in Hollywood—with a good tan they would offer her a job. And she very much wanted to be offered a job. For three years she had been out of the market and out of the country. But even in Europe the women she knew had interesting jobs and were making good salaries.

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"I wonder if it's too late to get in as a starlet?" she asked herself. "I may be thirty-one but I've never been prettier. I'm thin and I'm tan and I speak French fluently."

She knocked over a warm bottle of Sasson Hair Oil and turned quickly to see if Frank had stirred. He was napping after a day of department stores. He was sixty-five years old and liked to buy her things.

Out of the room she tiptoed with her tape recorder and quietly shut the door to the bedroom. Slipping across the living room and into the kitchen she picked up a bottle of vitamin B-15. Bryn had been told it could keep you young forever but only if you pop about eight at a time. She tossed twelve into her mouth and washed them down with six M&M's. Then she opened the refrigerator for a swig of Lite beer.

Beside the beer, in an almost empty refrigerator, stood a bottle of tonic water and an ancient alarm clock. Frank had six new-fangled clocks around the apartment but this was the only one that kept perfect time. Frank liked it because he knew how to set it. You turned the big knob in back and the big hands moved; you turned the little knob and the little hand moved. Frank was obsessed with time but Bryn couldn't stand the ticking. It was her idea to keep the clock in the refrigerator.

"Really," she thought. "I have no concept of time at all." When her brother came down she asked him what month it was. "Oh, come on," he said condescendingly.

"It's St. Patrick's Day." She snapped her fingers. "I wish I had something green to wear."

Her fingers tapped the buttons on the recorder. One pushed the play button, another rolled back the volume. Wherever she went (except out to dinner) the tape recorder was with her. Her fingers governed it like an accountant's, a calculator.

Uh Uh Uh Uh Staying Alive

Bryn played disco music when she was free to dance and country and western when stillness was called for. But now the disco and vitamins filled her with boogie. Her teeth pressed in over her lower lip and her chin and shoulders harmonized in a series of small jerks. She had seen the movie *Saturday Night Fever* three times and John Travolta was her latest unrequited

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love.

Out on the terrace she leaned over the railing, smiling at the sun and her own good fortune. Seven stories below million dollar yachts sat motionless while cigarette boats rolled with the motion of the water.

"Mother hated the people who owned these yachts and yet she came down for a week and stayed for three."

It had been embarrassing having her mother around. Every night she'd get drunk and ask people their ages. One night someone asked her *her* age. She giggled, got flustered, threw her arms around Bryn. "Guess! How old do you think I am to have such a young-looking daughter?"

Frank couldn't stand her. The night after she stayed out late with a Captain, Frank asked her if he were any good in bed. Thirteen guests had been present at the dinner table. Bryn thought she should have said something, spare the woman who she could see was obviously humiliated, but what had her mother ever done for her? For years she had been calling Bryn a whore. Both her mother and her brother called her a whore, but they both came down to Miami to see her.

"I've really got to get a job," thought Bryn. "I'd like to do something really well and get paid a lot of money for it. I suppose I do this well." She imagined the word "concubine" spanning three years on a resume. "But I don't want to do this anymore."

Still, she didn't regret it. She had done things and gone places that she would never have done or gone to otherwise. These three months with Frank; a year and a half with a French Count. The Count was also a set designer. They went all over on the search for locations. She had been to Switzerland, the Seychelles, Morocco. She had dipped artichoke leaves with Belmondo and played gin rummy with Pacino.

"I want to be a star!" thought Bryn with the enthusiasm of a first thought. She had already told Frank that she wanted a career and preferably one that took place in L.A. He said he would ask Maggie Bickle. Maggie knew everyone, especially in Hollywood.

"Is she really very rich?" Bryn asked when Frank woke up.

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"Yes, she's very rich."

Bryn decided on the Grace Kelly look and brushed and brushed and brushed back her hair.

Out into the pink and gray twilight that hung heavily over the concrete strips of Miami, Bryn drove Frank's Cadillac. Frank was sitting on her right in his blue and white seersucker, pressing an invisible brake with his loafer.

"Right here. Slow down to 50. Better get into the outer lane. Take this exit."

Though Bryn hated taking directions, she needed him tonight and would humour him with obedience. She glanced at herself in the rearview mirror just as the car passed under a street lamp. It was horrible what fluorescent lighting could do. You were driving along feeling your Grace Kelly bone structure and you checked into the mirror to be sure it was true but what the mirror gave back to you was the yellowing criss-cross of age by your eyes. Bryn looked at Frank. Except for his eyes, he was in pretty good shape.

A tall, thin, angular man, Frank was caught in the vortex between elegant and grotesque. The way that he dressed—the jacket, the polo shirt, the gray straight-legged trousers—was elegant. How he signalled waiters, turned his ear only when spoken to, said nothing when he had nothing to say—all this was elegant. But his disease: they called it moon-eyes in horses. Moon-eyes meant horses would eventually go blind. Frank had a year and a half of sight to go. After that, the white half-moons that were invading his irises would rise up completely and block out the light. Even now Frank couldn't see at night. There was something terrifying in his look. Bryn had seen children refuse to approach him, but Frank was no martyr; he stayed away from children. He kept company instead with horses and women and preferred horses because they didn't pity him. That's why he liked Bryn because she didn't either. He often told her that she reminded him of his favorite mare who happened to be barren yet full of herself. He said she was feisty and quirky and lusty. No good for breeding but excellent for display.

Bryn parked the Cadillac at the dead end of one of the more

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delapidated streets, across from a high stucco wall covered with kudzu and broken glass. As she and Frank approached the gate, three fierce white dogs hurled themselves against the bars. The dry black skin around their teeth wrinkled up into the shiny wetness of their pink and freckled gums.

"Hoopla!" shouted a man who was standing in the doorway. One of the dogs bounded up to him and a uniformed houseboy rushed from the Spanish mansion to restrain the other two.

"Don't worry," said the Colonel. "They only bite delivery boys."

Colonel Bickle, known as Bic, looked like a Kentucky Colonel. His hair was white-yellow, his large face was bright red, his nose looked swollen and he had no beard.

"Shake the hand of the owner of the winner of today's race." He was friendly and gracious and held a large trophy.

"Who won it?" asked Frank.

"Big Duke."

Bryn shook his hand and entered the high, beamed living room. From the mantel up, the room looked like a church. Below, it was more like a storeroom for different periods of antique junk. In the Victorian cluster, plopped against the gold velvet of a Queen Anne's chair, sat Maggie Bickle. She didn't notice Bryn at first. She seemed far away, in her own meditation. Her face was still handsome; her profile was noble; one gray strand fell loose from her rider's knot. Bound up inside the sheen of a green and purple pantsuit, her large body was rigid. She could barely move her neck. At the nape of her neck the zipper was half-open. And she seemed angry. Glancing back at Bic who was getting credit for her race horse, she raised her eyes to Bryn.

"Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm Bryn Corley. What a marvelous room this is. I've heard so much about you."

Maggie didn't answer. Frank hurried toward her and stooped to embrace her while Bryn made herself comfortable and spread her skirt on the settee.

On the coffee table stood an unopened box of corn chips.

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"May I have one?" Bryn asked.

"Help yourself," said Maggie dryly.

Dinner was to be served aboard a mahogany yacht. Mr. Mitchum would not be there. Bic led the way across the back lawn through the azaleas and the gardenias and the aloe plants, past the grand old cedars dripping globs of Spanish moss, along the cockled sea wall to the mahogany yacht. It gleamed like Bryn's mother's dining room table.

Frank stayed behind with Maggie. Both of them were horse-breeders. They had begun discussing an epidemic of gonorrhea among the horses in Maryland where both maintained their large farms.

Bryn crossed the gangplank ahead of Bic. She was startled at the expanse and dryness of the deck. She always assumed that in spite of massive exteriors, yachts were just boats, damp and claustrophobic inside.

Bic told her that this yacht was a Trumpie. The Trumpie was the Rolls Royce of yachts. This was no fragile floating thing subject to the wind or the current in the water. This yacht was a vault with its own handsome young Captain and a young Irish cook who had been educated by the best chefs in France. The cook did everything: cook, serve and keep the boat clean.

The yacht was immaculate. Every room was carpeted and curtained. The furniture was ample; the living room was wide. There was an organ, a television, a desk and an easy chair. Over the dining room table was a crystal chandelier.

And built into the wall along the staircase leading down to the sleeping quarters below were bookshelves filled with first-editions and leather bound books. In the master bedroom a color T.V. set sat on a shelf over the foot of the double bed. Smaller T.V. sets were placed between twin beds in two of the three other guest rooms. Even the bathroom was a normal-sized bathroom, but with luxurious trimmings. When Bryn sat down on the mahogany toilet seat she pulled out and read twelve astrological messages written on consecutive squares of the toilet paper. She reached for a handle that was not there and then noticed a brass pedal on the floor at her feet. A gentle

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swish of fragrant blue water circled and cleaned and refilled the bowl.

"The best thing about it," said Bic who had been waiting for Bryn by the staircase, "is that if you don't like your neighbors you can pick up and leave."

"It's better than fences!" joked Bryn. She liked her line and would store it for her memoirs. "To pick up and leave can be better than fences."

On the deck the cook served drinks. Bic said his name was Allan. The two looked out over the water. Bic suddenly said, "It was the most horrible thing I ever saw and it happened right out there in the harbor." His voice trembled, like a child telling a ghost story. "Out of the clear blue came this sharp, skinny speedboat—they're called cigarettes. This one buzzed right in front of us. It splashed us on purpose right up on the deck here and then turned and headed straight for a small, yellow yacht. A big, gray-haired woman was sitting on the deck fishing and—we couldn't believe it—the cigarette jumped over her and landed on the other side. It might have hit a wave or something but it looked so deliberate.

"We sped over to check on the woman thinking she must have been terrified—well, it was much worse than that. Her legs had been cut off just above the knees. We gave her our blankets. And all the ice we had with us. We phoned for the Coast Guard. What else could we do?"

"How old was she?" Bryn asked.

"Around sixty-five."

"Did she go into shock?"

"Of course she went into shock!"

"Is she alive?"

"Last I heard."

"I can't imagine a person of that age surviving a thing like that," said Bryn looking down at her own knees. She would rather lose one of her lungs than have either of her legs harmed. She had always admired her beautiful legs. She could thank her mother for that. Her mother still had beautiful legs, though in just seven months she too would be sixty. Bryn couldn't imagine surviving old age. She was convinced she'd die young

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and tragically. Maybe in a cigarette boat heading straight out to sea.

Bryn turned from the sea back to the gangplank where Maggie was crossing with the support of Frank's arm. As the two of them descended into the yacht, Bryn stood up to join them but Frank signalled her down.

"Dinner is ready," announced Allan politely.

"Get in here," yelled Maggie from below. "We want to eat."

Maggie was plunked sourly at the head of the table on a red leather bench that was built into the wall.

The first course was pompano. Bryn was very fond of pompano and her appetite was not curbed by Maggie's talk of gonorrhea.

"It all happened in the Queen's stables."

"Did the Queen know?"

"No, but her manager did."

"Why didn't he tell her?"

"He was too polite," said Frank.

"How did it get to America?"

"A French stallion brought it."

"Those French stallions!" said Bryn who had spent two years in Paris.

After the pompano Allan brought out the artichokes: four whole artichokes and two different sauces.

"I can't eat all that!" snapped Maggie.

Allan removed the plate and brought it back with half an artichoke. He then refilled the wine glasses and returned to the kitchen.

"Wonderful little fellow," said Bic. "We could never replace him."

"Remember Sonny?" asked Maggie. "That little pony we found in our front yard?"

"Sonny?" asked Bic.

"We found this pony in our front yard and nobody ever claimed him. We kept him around—he made a great little teaser."

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"What's a teaser?" asked Bryn.

"A teaser," said Frank putting his elbows on the table. He coughed and cleared his throat and wiped his mouth with a napkin. His cloudy blue eyes, which were generally half-closed, were wide open. "It's like this. You don't want to get your stallion's balls kicked off by some bitch mare who's not in heat. So you get another, smaller horse—or maybe a pony—to tease her. You tie her down by all but one leg then you mount the tease on her. If she's in heat, she'll take him. Just as he's about to come you have a couple of men ready to yank his penis out and twist it to the side."

"The poor teaser!" said Bryn.

"Oh well. We give them a whore a couple times a year."

"The best teaser I ever saw had a crooked penis," said Maggie.

"What's a whore?"

"A whore is a mare who is always in heat but never gets pregnant."

"Why call her a whore?"

"Because she loves it, that's why."

"Why not call her a teaser too?"

"No, the mares are called testers. When a stallion has just come down from the racetracks, he's either a virgin or hasn't screwed in six months. His first load of sperm is going to be stale. You don't want to put it into a good mare, so you bring the test mare in and the stallion unloads into her. Otherwise, it's just a waste." He turned his palms up, then returned them to his lap where he picked up his napkin and wiped off his hands.

The roast beef with mushroom sauce arrived in very thin slices on individual plates. A wedge of tomato sat like a rose to the side.

"Iggy?" called Maggie to an ugly yellow dog who was asleep on a chair in the corner. "Come over here, Iggy."

The dog jumped to the floor and crawled under the table where Maggie delivered several slices of beef to him.

"You should have seen him in the hospital," said Maggie.

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"They smuggled him in in a blanket. I thought I was going to die and I wanted to say goodbye to him. I was kissing him one last time when Duke Wayne called. I was crying so hard I couldn't talk to him. He said, "That's okay, Maggie. I understand. I'll call you tomorrow." I love that man. He's got cancer. I think maybe I'll call him later tonight."

"Shall I bring you the phone?" asked Bryn enthusiastically. She wanted to make sure that Maggie called the Duke while she was there.

"After dinner," said Maggie, looking a little taken back.

As Allan came out with a fresh bottle of wine, Bryn asked Maggie if she was going to eat her mushrooms.

"No," said Maggie. "I don't like mushrooms."

"Do you think I could have them? Unless, of course, Iggy wants them. Perhaps I could share them with Iggy."

"Iggy doesn't like mushrooms either," said Maggie coldly.

After Bryn had finished Maggie's mushrooms and the roast beef left on Frank's plate, she glanced at the beef still lying on Bic's, but Allan removed it before she could ask.

"Do you have coffee?" said Frank.

"Yes, sir. There's a fruit salad for dessert."

Maggie pointed to a large basket of fancy fruit. "Robert Mitchum sent us that. He was here last night."

"He was?" moaned Bryn, aching with disappointment. She asked Allan, "Do you have any ice cream?"

"I have chocolate ice cream."

"Ummmmm, my favorite."

"You *do* like to eat," observed Maggie. "How do you stay so slim?"

"I play a lot of tennis," said Bryn quickly. "I'm getting pretty good at it, wouldn't you say, Frank?"

Frank held his hand out and tipped it back and forth.

When Allan came back with dessert, Frank cleared his throat again. He was a three-pack-a-day man and had to do this often. His head gave an involuntary shake and he leaned back in his seat. "I want to ask you something," he announced to no one in particular.

"What is it, sweetheart?" said Maggie.

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"Bryn wants to go to Hollywood. She wants to get a job there."

"What kind of job?"

"Something to do with the movies."

"You want to be an *actress*?" asked Maggie.

"No, no, I don't want to be an actress. I want to work in the production end of things. Maybe with an agent or something."

"An agent! What do you want to work with an agent for?"

"I know it's the armpit of the industry," Bryn said and immediately wondered where she had heard *that* before, 'the armpit of the industry.' "But you've got to start somewhere," she added gaily.

Maggie turned to Frank.

"She knows what I think of the idea," said Frank. "She knows that I think that it's futile and foolish. But she wants to go anyway. Is there anything you can do for her?"

"You want my advice, honey?" Maggie said to Bryn. "Stay away from it. There is no worse place in the world than Hollywood and I've known some lousy places. Look at the horse business! But let me tell you, the horse business is nothing compared to Hollywood. I ought to know. I was up for Scarlett."

"You were up for Scarlett!" Bryn's eyes opened wide and she lost all her sophistication.

"And they damn near took me, too. But they put me on this train with David Selznik and he tried to get me to do something all the way from New York to Los Angeles. Can you imagine that? Listen, honey, you know what you have to do in order to make it in Hollywood? You have to sleep with Jews. You wouldn't want to do that."

"I'd like to enjoy my own mistakes."

Maggie shook her head. "Where's Liza?" she asked Bic. "Liza would take her around."

Bryn lifted the bowl and scooped out the last spoonful of ice cream, all the while keeping her eyes on Maggie. Then she put the bowl down, wiped off her chin, and became serious. Her voice lost its girlish impressionability.

"Look. I love the movies. It's been the one thing I've been interested in all my life. When I lived in New York, I saw ten,

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sometimes twenty movies a week. A couple double features in an afternoon were nothing to me. I stood in line for two hours in the pouring rain to see the seven A.M. showing of *The Godfather* and I had already seen it the night before.

"And I've been in several movies. One in Switzerland with Al Pacino and a couple of others. And I write too. I've been writing my memoirs every day for a year. That's what I really want to be. I want to be a writer."

"Oh, pooh," said Frank. "She can't write."

Bryn put her chin in one hand and without looking at Frank flicked her lighter at his unlit cigarette. He took her hand and brought the flame forward.

"Well," said Maggie appraising Bryn like a race horse. "It shouldn't be too hard to find a job for a girl as smart and attractive as you are. Bic, let's call Sam Spiegel. He can get her a job. Maybe a small one at first."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Bryn, full of hope.

"When are you ready to start?"

"Well, I have to go to Paris. And, ummm, sublet my apartment. And I sort of thought I might go to Greece. God," she mused out loud, "I hate to work in the summer. Maybe at the end of August? Or the beginning of September?"

"Forget it, baby," said Maggie.

Bryn lowered her eyes and Frank leaned back in his chair.

"We'll see what we can do for you," the Colonel said sweetly.

Maggie turned all her attention to Frank and asked about an old girlfriend of his and how she was doing in the business he helped start. Frank said she was doing very well and had already paid back his initial investment. Bryn all of a sudden felt overwhelmingly tired and restless and bored and she wanted to go home.

"Maybe we ought to go," she said. "You've been ill. We shouldn't keep you awake."

"Oh, hell. I don't sleep anyway. I slept four hours after the operation and that was it. Haven't slept since," said Maggie.

"Take pills," said Bryn.

"Don't take pills," said Frank.

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"I never take pills," said Maggie. "I'd rather not sleep than take pills."

"So would I," said Frank.

"At least I'm *doing* something. I know I'm alive."

Bryn took a cigarette from Frank's pack. He lit it for her as Maggie looked on disapprovingly. Maggie turned to Bic. "Let's call the Duke now."

"We could do that."

"Better yet, let's send him the trophy. We'll have it engraved: To the Duke from Big Duke. He'll love that. He's not going to last long. One lung and he's still smoking. Now it's his heart."

"How old is he?" asked Bryn inhaling.

"Seventy-one."

"How old are you?"

"Seventy-one." Maggie looked at Bryn and then turned to Frank. "He's got one of those breathers."

"He probably has pneumonia," said Bryn. "When you get old, pneumonia gets you."

Maggie winced and reached for Frank's hand. He looked at her with sad affection and nodded for Bryn to pass the cigarettes.

"They're all gone," Bryn said. "I guess we'll have to go."

"Don't go," said Maggie. "Just stop smoking cigarettes."

"It's just a habit."

"Get another habit. One that's good for you."

"But I like smoking. I just took it up."

From the galley they heard footsteps.

"Is that you Captain?" she called out.

A young male voice said that it was. He came into the living room. The Captain was tall, blonde and movie-star handsome.

"Oh," said Bryn brightening. "I bet you smoke Marlboros."

"He doesn't smoke," said Maggie coldly.

The Captain smiled. "Well, I just happen to have some cigarettes with me." He tossed a pack of Marlboros into Bryn's lap.

"Thanks," smiled Bryn.

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Frank reached into her lap and took out the cigarettes, put two in his mouth, lit both, and gave one back to Bryn.

"We couldn't keep him if we didn't let him bring his beautiful playmates on board," said Maggie. "They stay a few days, then he starts flirting with the other girls. The first ones get mad and before you know it they're gone."

"Test mares," laughed Bryn flashing her blue eyes at the Captain.

"We'll need you to help Maggie back to the house," said Bic.

"Certainly," said the Captain who stood back with his arms folded.

Bryn turned to Frank and said, "It's time to go home," and then went up to the Captain.

"Kiss me, I'm Irish," she said.

He backed away and said, "Sorry, I'm not."

"May I have a light then?" she said holding a cigarette.

"Sure," he said lighting it and then, "Keep the matches."

"You were talking to him for a half an hour!" said Frank as Bryn drove home.

"I was talking to him for *three* minutes," said Bryn.

"You have no sense of propriety."

"I'm not a piece of property."

"What are you then?"

Bryn turned to look at him. She looked at him until the car began to swerve off the road.

"I might have been something if you hadn't interfered."

"How did I interfere?"

"By telling Maggie you thought it was foolish for me to go to Hollywood. The whole point of tonight's dinner was to get me a job and I'm as unemployed now as I ever was. Frank, I think you could have tried harder."

Frank remained silent until they got back to his condominium. He sat down on the sofa and put his head in his hands. Bryn walked past him and into the kitchen. She stood at the counter clutching the alarm clock, waiting for him to go to bed so she could sleep on the couch. Finally, she got tired of

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waiting.

She found him sitting on the sofa in the same position she had left him. After a moment he looked up and narrowed his eyes as if he'd been thinking.

"You'll never find a job because you've never stayed with one thing long enough to pick up any skills. And if you think you'll find a husband, you can forget that too. You've no interest in housekeeping and you don't know how to cook. No man wants a wife who doesn't know how to cook. The only thing you're any good at is being some man's mistress. And if you want my opinion you're not very good at that."

She threw the alarm clock at him. It ricocheted off his forehead into a picture of his favorite stallion. The glass cracked, the stand collapsed and the picture slapped flat onto the surface of the table. There was a scratch above Frank's eye.

"I'm sorry!" Bryn cried, afraid he was going to hit her. "I'm really sorry Frank. Let's not fight anymore."

"If only you'd touch me—show some sign of affection." It was hard for Frank to say this. The words got caught in his throat and he looked down at his hands. Bryn moved forward and set the picture straight up again and offered to have the glass replaced the next day.

That night, for the first time in their three months together, Bryn fell asleep in Frank's arms. He held her very gently and was careful not to apply the least bit of pressure. She felt so safe that when she fell asleep she dreamed that he was holding her. Then he nodded off and rolled over onto her shoulder. She woke from the pressure of the iron weight of his arm.

"Frank," she repeated in a low speaking voice until he turned over and away from her, leaving her once more alone. She couldn't sleep. She took a couple of sleeping pills out of the drawer and turned on the Merle Haggard tape just below Frank's hearing level. He began to snore. She took a pen light and shone it on the back of his neck. A thousand lines cracked the skin like a parched Mojave desert. The white hairs, sparse as cacti, stood up straight and short and stubbly. When she turned the light off, she could shut her eyes and see his neck.

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Miami between four and five in the morning was jet grey. The pollution from the planes and the cars on the highway gelled with the light from the forthcoming dawn. Bryn drove Frank's Cadillac off an exit ramp toward the ocean.

The thick, black ocean rolled in like sleep. Bryn lay on her side, her head on her arm. "Think," she commanded but thought didn't come easily. All she knew was that if she left Frank she would have to get a job.

She *should* have had a job by now. All of that travelling and all those celebrities. All of those people who were going to do something for her. She had been in *one movie*: one. Playing a girl with a broken arm. Every morning they spent forty-five minutes putting the cast on. Before lunch, they took it off; after lunch, they put it on again. Not once was it ever seen in the movie. All that was seen was the back of her head. She got the part by doing a tap-dance. Imagine that. Doing a tap-dance to play the part of a cripple.

Bryn fell asleep on the edge of the shoreline. When she woke up her knees were floating in water. The tide deposited a small shell beside her and quickly drew back leaving a long wrinkled wake in the soft wet sand.

Then something happened. Something Bryn had never seen before. There was a catch in the water; a hesitation. And then, in a moment, she saw a definite shift. The next wave didn't quite reach the foam left over from the last one and the one after that lapped to a lower mark still.

"I just saw the exact moment the tide changed! It must mean something," she sighed.

All around her the waves rushed up hopefully and even more quickly were sucked back to sea.

When Frank got up Bryn was sitting on the terrace drinking tea with three tablespoons of honey and reading the *National Enquirer*.

"Oh," she grabbed her stomach. "Jackie Wilson died. That really saddens me."

"Who's Jackie Wilson?" asked Frank.

"He sang 'Tears on My Pillow'."

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Frank sat down and took her hand and looked at her tenderly. She could tell he was thinking of how she fell asleep in his arms.

"Do you remember?" he asked.

"Remember what?" She didn't want to hurt him but she couldn't stand it when he mooned this way. Besides, she had decided to be a stewardess and she had to get away.

"You know, Frank, I was thinking, I really have to earn some money."

"I'll give you money."

"No, I mean I have to earn my own."

"Well?"

"What do you think about my becoming a stewardess?"

"A stewardess! That's just a waitress in the sky. Why not be a pilot?"

"I hate responsibility."

"Well then travel around with me. I have to go to Europe at the end of May."

"Frank, really, I have to get out on my own. I have no identity here. I'm tired of being a 'Frank Kiernan' girl."

"You think you're going to find your identity serving coffee, tea and milk?"

"I love travelling and I love serving people. My very favorite job involved serving people."

"What was that?"

"I sold ice cream from a truck when I was sixteen."

"Look. I was thinking about going to Alaska."

"Alaska! I've always wanted to go to Alaska."

"I want to go this summer."

"But it's just March!" groaned Bryn.

"It's too damn cold to go up there in March."

"Alaska," Bryn sighed. It was becoming a mantra.

"Well, think about it and let me know what you're thinking."

Bryn thought about it all through her tennis lesson. After the lesson she stopped at the bar.

"Iced tea," she said to the bartender. "Have you ever been to Alaska?"

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"No," he said serving up the iced tea.

Bryn took out her cigarettes and matches Maggie's Captain had given her. Inside of the matchbook which was white on the outside was a note that read "You can reach me at" and then the number.

"He likes me!" cried Bryn. "I knew that he liked me."

She slid off the barstool and crossed the dance floor, languidly placing one foot in front of the other. She pressed a white cube and a red one on the jukebox, thinking, "Maybe the Captain would like to go to Alaska." She had a burning desire to go to Alaska. "Or maybe I'll take a Greyhound and go all by myself."

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Michael Cunningham is a recent recipient of a James Michener Foundation Grant, which permitted the completion of a novel. A former fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, he now resides in New York City.
Lamar Herrin is the author of two novels, *The Rio Loja Ringmaster* and *American Baroque*. He won the *Paris Review* Aga Khan Prize in 1974 for the opening chapter of *Rio Loja*. He has published short stories in many literary journals.
Norman Mailer's most recent work includes *The Executioner's Song* and *Pieces and Pontifications*, a collection of essays.
Jay McInerney is the Cornelia Ward Fellow at Syracuse University, where he is at work on his first novel. This is Jay McInerney's first published story.
Barbara Milton teaches mathematics and writes novels in New York City. Her first published story appeared in the *Paris Review*.
Craig Nova has published four novels, the most recent of which is *The Good Son*. He lives in Vermont where he is at present at work on a new novel, *Alexandra*. This is his first published short story.

POETRY

Bruce Andrews is the author of *Wobbling*, *Love Songs*, and *Sonnets (Momento Mori)* and editor, with Charles Bernstein, of L = A = N = G = U = A = G = E. He lives in New York City, where he teaches political economics at Fordham University.
Arakawa is a diagrammatic painter who is currently involved, with Madeline Gins, in making a model of mind-body.
Alan Bernheimer is the author of *Café Isotope* (The Figures) and *State Lounge* (Tuumba Press). He is active in San Francisco's Poets Theater.

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Charles Bernstein's recent books include *Islets/Irritations*, *The Occurrence of Tune*, and *Controlling Interests*. *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, edited with Bruce Andrews, is forthcoming from Southern Illinois University Press. He lives in New York.

Tina Darragh lives in the Washington, D.C. area. She has two recent books: *Pi in the Skye* and *On the Corner to Off the Corner* (Sun & Moon Press, College Park, MD).

Alan Davies has just published a large collection of his poetry, *Active 24 Hours* (Roof Books, NY). He is editor of *A Hundred Posters* and lives in Brooklyn.

Ray DiPalma has recently published *Two Poems* (Awede Press, Windsor, VT) and *23 Works* and *13 Works*, both from Editions Vogelsang in Berlin. He lives in Manhattan.

Lynne Dreyer's *Step Work* will be published later this season by Tuumba Press. Previous books include *Stampede* and *Lamplights Used to Feed the Deer*. She lives in Falls Church, Virginia.

Madeline Gins is author of *What the President Will and Say and Do* and *Word Rain* (Grossman) and co-author, with Arakawa, of *The Mechanism of Meaning* (Harry Abrams). She lives in New York, where she is currently at work on a book of medical interviews.

Michael Gottlieb's *Ninety-Six Tears* (Roof) was published in 1981 and *Local Color/Eidetic Deniers* was published in 1979. He lives in New York City where he edits Case Books.

Ted Greenwald's most recent works are *Exit the Face*, a collaboration with artist Richard Bosman (Museum of Modern Art Editions) and *Young and Restless* with George Schneeman (Case Books). L Publications published his *Common Sense* in 1978.

Robert Grenier is author of *Dusk Road Games* (Pym Randall Press), *Sentences* (Whale Cloth Press), *Series* (This Press), *Cambridge M'ass* (Tuumba Press), *Oakland* (Tuumba), and *Burns' Night Heard* (Tamsy Press). He lives in Oakland and has taught at New College in San Francisco.

Carla Harryman edits *Qu*, a magazine of poets' prose, from Oakland. Her books are *Percentage*, *Under the Bridge*, and *Property*.

Lyn Hejinian is co-editor (with Barrett Watten) of *Poetics Journal* and publisher of Tuumba Press. Her books include *My Life* (Burning Deck), *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* (The Figures), and *Gesualdo* (Tuumba). She lives in Berkeley.

Susan Howe is author of *Pythagorean Silence*, *The Secret History of the Dividing Line*, and *The Western Borders*. A new collection of her work is forthcoming from Kulcher Press. She lives in Guilford, Connecticut.

P. Inman lives in Mt. Ranier, Maryland. His books include *Platin* (Sun & Moon Press) and *Ocker* (Tuumba Press).

Ken Irby's books include *The Grasslands of North America*, *For Max Douglas*, *The Flower Having Passed Through Paradise in a Dream*, *Relation*,

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Archipelago, *Catalpa* and *Orexis*. He lives in Lawrence, Kansas.
Douglas Messerli edits Sun & Moon Press from his home in College Park, Maryland. A professor at Temple University, he is author of *Some Distance* and *Dinner on the Lawn*.
Bob Perelman is author of *Braille* (Ithaca House Press), *7 Works* (The Figures), *a.k.a.* (Tuumba), and *Primer* (This). The editor of *Hills*, his play, "The Alps," was produced in 1982 by the Poets Theater of San Francisco.
Peter Seaton has two books—*The Son Master* (Roof) and *Agreement* (Asylum's). He lives in New York City.
James Sherry's books are *Part Songs*, *In Case*, and *The Converses*. He lives in New York, where he directs the Segue Foundation and edits Roof Books.
Ron Silliman's books include *Tjanting*, *Ketjak*, *BART*, *Sitting Up, Standing, Taking Steps*, and *Mohawk*. His essays have been widely published. He is editor of *Tottel's* and lives in San Francisco.
Diane Ward lives in New York City. She is author of *Trop-I-Dom*, *The Light American*, *Theory of Emotion*, and *On Duke Ellington's Birthday*.
Hannah Weiner is the author of *Clairvoyant Journal* (Angel Hair Books) and *Little Books/Indians* (Roof Books). She lives on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

INTERVIEWS

Elizabeth Pell Broadwell is assistant professor of English at Christian Brothers College, Memphis, Tennessee. Her work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The Georgia Review*, and *South Atlantic Bulletin*.
Edwina Burness was born in Edinburgh and lives in the countryside near London. She has an M.A. from Cambridge and a Ph.D. from London University, both in English and American Literature. She reviews for the *Times Educational Supplement*, contributes to the *Spectator* and *Harpers and Queen*, teaches part-time at London University, and is currently collaborating on a book on socio-historical linguistics.
Jerry Griswold teaches children's literature at San Diego State University and is the author of a forthcoming study of Randall Jarrell's children's books. His work has appeared in *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and regularly in *The Los Angeles Times*.
Ronald Wesley Hoag is a visiting assistant professor in the English department at East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina. His critical work and interviews have appeared in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, *Studies in the Novel*, *The Southern Review*, *The Georgia Review*, and elsewhere.

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ART

Sandro Chia was born in Florence in 1946, and currently lives in Rome and New York. He has had recent one-man exhibitions at James Corcoran Gallery, Los Angeles, and Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York and been included in exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
Francesco Clemente was born in Naples in 1952, and lives and works in Rome, Madras, and New York. His paintings and drawings have been shown at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, University Art Museum, Berkeley, and Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.
Eric Fischl was born in New York in 1948 and currently lives in New York. His work has been included in recent exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, and Edward Thorp Gallery, New York.
Richard Mock was born in Long Beach, California, in 1944, and lives in New York. His work has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and Brooke Alexander Gallery, New York.

FEATURES

Don Asher is the author of six novels and a biography, *Raise Up Off Me: A Portrait of Hampton Hawes*. "The Barrier" is an excerpt from a larger work, *The Music Game: High Times and Lowlifes*.
Timothy Tung currently works as a specialist in Chinese materials at the City College Library. A columnist for *Dushu* (Reading), a Peking literary monthly, he also contributes to various Chinese and American journals.

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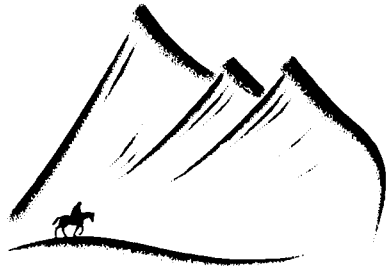

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